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ABSTRACT

The combination of poverty, inadequate attention, and the difficult period of young adulthood has serious implications for young Puerto Rican men. To draw attention to their strengths, needs, and status, the National Council of La Raza Poverty Project conducted a two-year community-based study on young Puerto Rican men and family poverty. This report presents study findings, research highlights, and suggested policy actions based on interviews with social-services workers and focus groups conducted with 44 young Puerto Rican men. The research indicates that low education and high unemployment are critical factors in Puerto Rican male status and family poverty. Insufficient adult guidance, single-parent families, and lack of services, including relevant educational opportunities, were cited by participants as contributing to difficulties. Focus-group participants faced multiple barriers to employment and poor work prospects. Recommendations include local and public policy initiatives. Four graphs illustrate the group's status. Four appendixes provide details about study methodology and summaries of activities of community-based organizations. (SLD)

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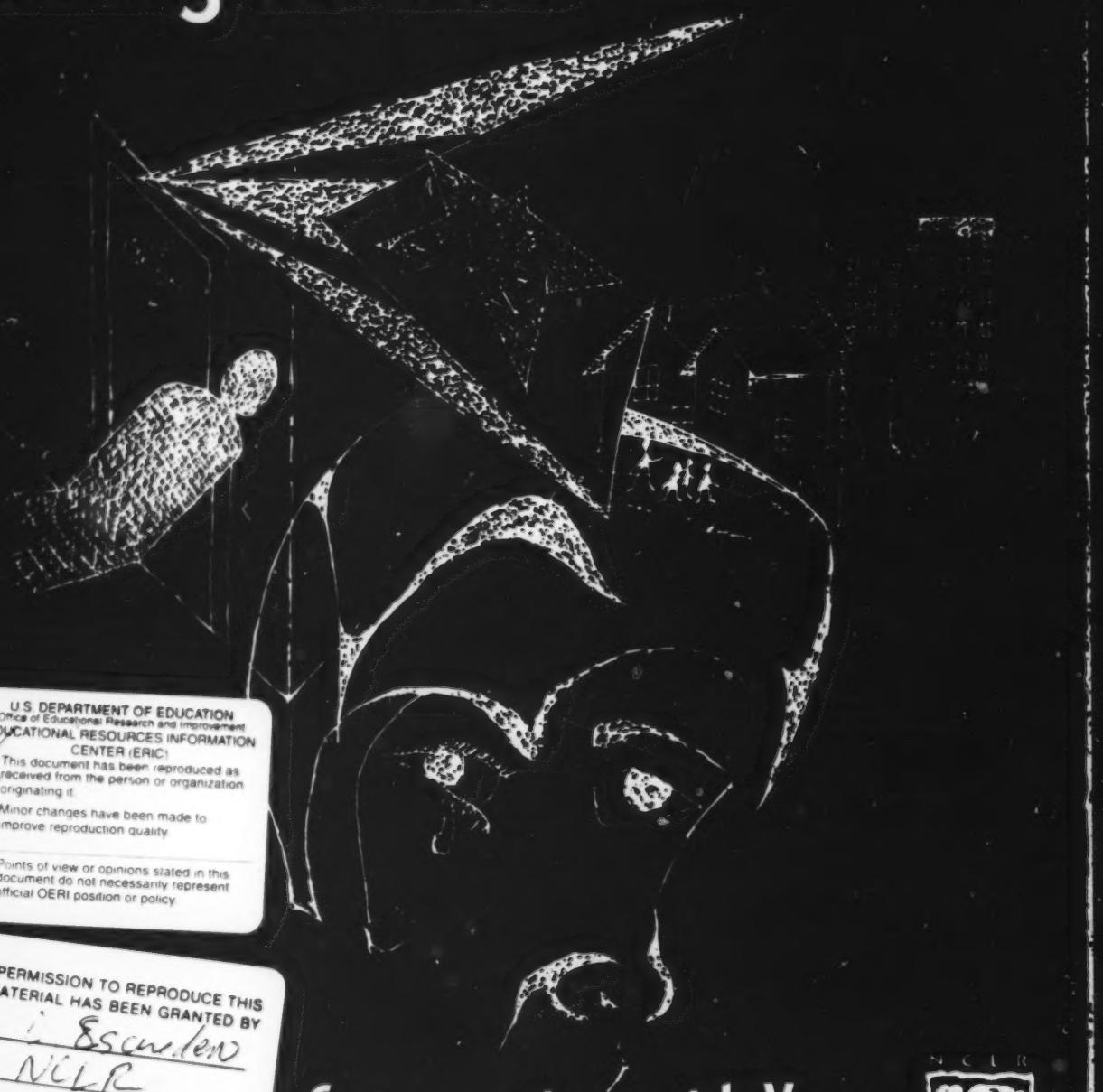

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Conversations with Young Puerto Rican Men

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The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest constituency-based national Hispanic organization, exists to improve life opportunities for the more than 22 million Americans of Hispanic descent. A nonprofit, tax-exempt organization incorporated in Arizona in 1968, NCLR serves as an advocate for Hispanic Americans and as a national umbrella organization for more than 170 formal "affiliates," community-based organizations serving Hispanics in 37 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. NCLR seeks to create opportunities and address problems of discrimination and poverty through four major types of initiatives:

- Capacity-building assistance to support and strengthen Hispanic community-based organizations;
- Applied research, public policy analysis, and advocacy on behalf of the entire Hispanic community, designed to influence public policies and programs so that they equitably address Hispanic needs;
- Public information efforts to provide accurate information and positive images of Hispanics in the mainstream and Hispanic media; and
- Special catalytic efforts which use the NCLR structure and reputation to create other entities or projects important to the Hispanic community, including international projects consistent with NCLR's mission.

NCLR is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and has program offices in Los Angeles, California; Chicago, Illinois; Phoenix, Arizona; and San Antonio, Texas.

The Poverty Project

The Poverty Project serves as NCLR's base for information and advocacy regarding Hispanic poverty in the United States. The Poverty Project develops and conducts research and policy analysis, monitors social policy and legislation, houses and maintains a Census Information Center, and disseminates information about Latino poverty to legislators, national and local organizations, the public and private sectors, and the media.

The Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty Project

The Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty Project is a special two-year, community-based study of the Poverty Project to examine the relationship between the socioeconomic status of Puerto Rican males aged 16-24 and the poverty of Puerto Rican families. The project's components include research, data compilation, and focus group interviews with young Puerto Rican men. The Project seeks to develop a greater understanding of Puerto Rican poverty, as well as identify and promote effective community-based and policy strategies for enhancing the education and employment options of Puerto Rican young men.

Funding for the Young Puerto Rican Men and Poverty Project was provided by the Ford Foundation. Additional funding for the completion of this report was provided by the Rockefeller Foundation through its support of the Poverty Project.

Speaking Out Loud: Conversations with Young Puerto Rican Men

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Sonia M. Pérez and Steven Cruz are Director and Research Associate, respectively, for the NCLR Poverty Project.

Gabriel Pacheco Rueda, Jr., who designed the cover art work, is a 23 year old New York-born Puerto Rican who uses his art "to break the cycle of poverty by echoing the cries of his people." The title of this work is "Circle of Poverty."

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Final responsibility for the content of the report rests with the authors. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and NCLR and do not necessarily reflect the positions of any NCLR funders, or of any of the individuals or organizations that participated in the Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty Project.

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Executive Summary

The transition from school to work, training, or higher education is difficult for all young people. For poor youth and those from racial and ethnic minority groups, the path to adulthood is especially challenging. It often means unsafe neighborhoods, poor schools, and few social or economic opportunities.

Among Hispanic groups, mainland Puerto Ricans have the highest rates of both family and child poverty; in 1992, over half of all Puerto Rican children (56.7%) were poor. Persistent poverty among Puerto Rican children and families has primarily been examined from the perspective of women; however, research has not explored either the effects of poverty on young Puerto Rican males or their role in family economic and social well-being. Moreover, programs and policies have inadequately served Puerto Ricans, partly because limited research exists on Puerto Rican youth — and even less on Puerto Rican men.

The combination of poverty, inadequate attention, and the difficult period of young adulthood has serious implications for Puerto Rican young men. It often results in involvement in drugs, crime, and delinquency which increasingly threatens not only their social and economic well-being, but also their lives. In an effort to draw attention to the strengths, needs, and status of young Puerto Rican men age 16-24, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) Poverty Project conducted a two-year community-based study on young Puerto Rican men and family poverty. This second and final report presents study findings, research highlights, and suggested community and policy actions to address the problems affecting Puerto Rican young men. These findings are especially timely given the current welfare reform and employment training policy debates.

NCLR research indicates that low education and high unemployment are critical factors in Puerto Rican male status and family poverty. In order to supplement research findings with community perspectives, structured discussions — focus group interviews — were conducted with Puerto Rican young men to assess their school and work experiences.

Focus group findings centered on five themes:

- **Families and neighborhoods**. Puerto Rican young men focus group participants described the difficulties of having insufficient adult guidance and living with one parent or in working-poor families in which parents were absent because of their job schedules. They also were angry at and concerned about the lack of resources in their neighborhoods. The missing community resource they believed was most important was relationships with Latino professionals.
- **Reflections on school**. As a group, participants had three sets of perspectives related to school. First, they believed that teachers did not want to help them. Second, they were uninterested in curriculum which was not relevant to their lives. Third, they expressed concern that school was not always a safe place for them. For many, these factors fueled their decisions to drop out of school, in spite of their belief that school was important to their future success.
- **Work experiences**. Focus group participants faced multiple barriers to employment, including limited education, few job skills, discrimination, concentration in

areas with high unemployment, and weak job networks. Many were not aware of opportunities for job training. Together, these factors translated into poor economic prospects. Many young men, as a result, grew discouraged; some gave up looking for employment, were not in school, and were, in effect, idle. Others looked to what they believed was the only option available for them to make money: selling drugs. Those who had held jobs or were currently employed indicated that they worked primarily in the low-paying service/retail industry.

- **The impact of drugs**. During the focus group sessions, talk of selling — more than using — drugs permeated each discussion. Participants demonstrated both an attraction and resistance to selling drugs. While they recognized that selling drugs involved danger, they believed they had no other lucrative employment opportunities. Although they did not see selling drugs as a long-term option, it was difficult to break away, once they were involved. The sale of drugs is directly connected to the educational and employment status of Puerto Rican young men: Faced with low-quality schools, unsympathetic teachers, and limited employment options, the young men who sold drugs felt they were making the choice that gave them the best chance for immediate survival.

- **Future goals**. Despite their limited social and economic opportunities, and their self-perceptions, most focus group participants described hopes and plans strikingly similar to those of middle-class youth: having families, developing careers, and owning homes and businesses. Some, however, did not look to the future at all; and focused on each day without thinking about long-term possibilities.

In addition to discussions with Puerto Rican young men, interviews were conducted with staff of community-based organizations (CBOs). These interviews reinforced the issues and concerns that the young men raised in the focus groups. In particular, practitioners identified the following problems for Puerto Rican young men:

- **Lack of strong male role models**. Without connections to positive adult males, young Puerto Rican men, already at a difficult developmental stage in their lives, are uncertain about their identity and their sense of responsibilities as men. The lack of such relationships can be harmful not only to their development, but also to their life options and choices.

- **Low levels of education**. During interviews, CBO staff noted two distinct concerns with respect to the education of Puerto Rican young males: poor quality instruction and curriculum, and peer and family pressure to be out of school. Young Puerto Rican men, therefore, are often poorly prepared for college or work.

- **Inadequate job training**. Community-based practitioners stressed the need for a broader range of training opportunities, as well as increased funding and availability in areas where young Puerto Rican men live. They believed that some programs were poorly developed, monitored, and funded. For example, many stressed placement of clients in positions over the development of basic educational skills. In addition, inadequate outreach and insufficient program information contributed to low participation levels.

- **Poor job prospects.** Because of limited work experience, inadequate educational preparation, poor behavioral work skills that interfere with the ability to maintain a job, and few contacts, Puerto Rican young men face difficulties in finding and keeping jobs. High unemployed and economic downturns, especially in urban areas, also affect their work opportunities.

- **Drug trafficking.** In the absence of positive influences, many young Puerto Rican men with poor educational achievement and weak job options choose to sell drugs. In certain cities, like Chicago, young men are embraced by gangs which serve as a surrogate family and promote drug trafficking.

As the findings show, Puerto Rican young men age 16-24 face serious obstacles as they move into adulthood and make the transition from school to work. These findings suggest that both policy and community-based changes are needed to enhance the education and employability of young Puerto Rican males.

On a local level:

- **The creation of working alliances with community-based organizations, corporations, and local business can help to increase employment opportunities for Puerto Rican youth.** Partnerships between businesses and nonprofit organizations to improve work experience or skills, provide internships, hands-on-training, and employment opportunities are needed. Such arrangements would also provide options to typically underfunded summer youth employment programs.

- **Community-based programs are needed to establish or strengthen links between young Puerto Rican men and positive adult males.** The need for positive role models, especially males, cannot be understated. For many young men growing up in female-headed households, insufficient adult guidance and support contribute to their poor adult outcomes. Without these role models, Puerto Rican young men will not be exposed to examples of success in their communities, and may not make any connection between education and future outcomes.

From a public policy perspective:

- **Efforts to improve school-to-work transitions and job training opportunities must target inner-city youth, especially Puerto Rican young men.** Latino and Black young males have the highest unemployment rates of any group in the country and face limited employment opportunities. Recent efforts to enhance the employability of workers and youth entering the labor force, such as the Reemployment Act, must ensure that Puerto Rican youth are adequately served. Program design, outreach strategies, provision of transportation and stipends, and effective administration of resources can improve the work opportunities available to Puerto Rican young men.

- **Strategies to foster economic development and job creation are needed in areas where Puerto Rican youth live.** Education, job training, and employment skills are crucial, but for many young men, jobs are not available in their communities or cities. Employment and training programs often are poorly advertised or limited in size, and thus do not effectively serve their target populations. In addition, pro-

grams and policies are needed to address the lack of economic growth, stagnating wages, and high unemployment in central cities in order to improve the poor employment status of Puerto Rican males.

- **City and state budgets must allocate funds to provide youth with recreation, sports, and work activities to create positive options for their time after school.** Strong communities effective at helping youth stay in school, seek higher education, and join the work force, have resources that are absent in many inner-city and economically disadvantaged areas. Activities to supplement the school day, teach valuable skills, and increase contact with successful adults are needed to assist young Puerto Rican men in their development. Often, however, city and state budgets ignore the needs of youth. The absence of such activities contributes to poor school performance, crime, and increased illegal activity.

- **Practitioners and policy makers must not forget young men as they design "prevention" and other programs for youth.** Current strategies designed to prevent school dropout and teenage pregnancy or teach parenting skills and provide job training are overwhelmingly targeted to young women or young mothers; young men also need assistance and would benefit from such services. Programs should be designed with a male component and aggressive outreach should be aimed at including Puerto Rican and other Latino young men.

The evidence strongly indicates that a lack of attention to the problems of Puerto Rican young men will have great social and economic costs. Policy makers must listen to these young adult voices and work with the Latino community to assure that they and their children have equal opportunities for economic success as well as social stability. For the Puerto Rican young men who believe that "they don't want to give us a chance," communities, employers, and policy makers must prove them wrong.

INTRODUCTION

Recent reports about adolescents and young adults in the U.S. indicate that today's youth* face more serious social and economic problems than their counterparts a generation ago. In addition to the inherent difficulties of making the transition from childhood to adulthood and from school to higher education, training, or work, young people today must also cope with inadequate levels of education, at a time when education is critical to economic success; shrinking job markets and higher unemployment; and a growth in social dangers like drug use, crime, and violence.

Increasing poverty, especially among young people of racial and ethnic minority groups, both contributes to and exacerbates all of these problems. Among Hispanics,** for example, social and economic indicators show that U.S. mainland Puerto Ricans — who are citizens by birth — are the most likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (See box on next page for additional information). In particular, Puerto Rican children and youth under 18 years of age have the highest poverty rate of any major racial and ethnic group; one of every two (56.7%) is poor.

For Puerto Rican youth, such poverty is manifested in unsafe neighborhoods, substandard schools, and poor economic prospects. For young Puerto Rican men, especially, this combination of problems is often aggravated by involvement in drugs, crime, and delinquency which increasingly threatens not only their social and economic well-being, but also their lives.

Persistent poverty among Puerto Rican children and families has primarily been studied from the perspective of women; specifically, research has focused on the proportion of Puerto Rican families headed by women and their labor force status. However, most research has not explored either the effects of poverty on young Puerto Rican males or their role in family economic and social well-being. Yet, information on Puerto Rican males is critical to social research and current public policies, especially those related to employment and training programs and welfare. Existing programs and policies have inadequately served Puerto Ricans, partly because limited research exists on Puerto Rican youth — and even less on Puerto Rican men.

The recent literature and emphasis on African American young males — and their similarities to Puerto Rican young men — also suggest a need for more research on Puerto Rican males. Preliminary studies have shown that Puerto Rican and African American males have similarly high unemployment rates and low labor force participation levels, and that both groups have a high percentage of single female-headed households. Poor social and economic status often translates into myriad obstacles along their path to adulthood, poor life opportunities, and adult poverty.[1]

Ensuring the social and economic success of Puerto Rican youth is critical both for the status of the Puerto Rican community as a whole and for the areas of the country where

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* For purposes of this report, "youth" will refer to young adults age 16-24

** The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans, and others of Spanish and Latin American descent.

they live. First, the increasing diversity and interconnectedness of urban areas and their surrounding suburbs means that social and economic problems are no longer confined to any one group or community.[2] Moreover, the growth of Puerto Rican and other Latino young adult populations, at a time when the proportion of White youth is declining, indicates that they are an increasingly significant part of both the school and work force populations. For example, recent data show that in important cities like Los Angeles and New York City over one in three students is Latino.[3] Puerto Ricans, like other minority youth, need to be adequately supported and prepared for the work force so that they can become productive members of society.

Responsibility for the status and outcomes of young Puerto Rican men and their families does not rest with the Puerto Rican community alone, however. Self-help and community-based efforts are critical to addressing the needs of socially disadvantaged young Puerto Rican men, but cannot singlehandedly eliminate their problems in the absence of public and private sector commitment to Latino youth. Federal and state initiatives to reduce unemployment among minority men, increase social and economic resources for urban areas, and provide social support for families are urgently needed as well.

In an effort to draw attention to the strengths, needs, and status of young Puerto Rican men, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) Poverty Project conducted a two-year community-based study on young Puerto Rican men and family poverty (For a detailed

What Do We Know About

▲ **Puerto Rican males are concentrated in low-paying or declining industries.** In 1992, one in ten Puerto Rican males age 16 and over (10.9%) worked in occupations designated managerial or professional, traditionally high-paying occupations. Conversely, almost half of Puerto Rican men worked in either technical/sales/administrative support positions (23.1%) or service occupations (22.4%) — categories that are typical of low-paying, low-benefit jobs. Almost one-quarter of Puerto Rican males (23.5%) worked as operators, fabricators, and laborers, while about one-fifth of Puerto Rican males (18.0%) were employed in precision production, craft, and repair sectors. These sectors are projected to suffer declines in the coming decades.

▲ **Puerto Ricans have lower median earnings than other Hispanics, African Americans, and Whites.** In 1991, Puerto Rican families had a median income of $20,654, compared to $23,884 for all Hispanic, $21,548 for African American, and $39,239 for White families.

▲ **Puerto Ricans have a high rate of female-headed households relative to all Hispanics and Whites.** While African Americans have the highest proportion of female-headed households (46.4%) of all racial and ethnic groups, data from 1992 show that Puerto Ricans have comparably high rates of single-mother families (40.9%), compared to all Hispanics (24.4%) and Whites (12.5%).

▲ **Puerto Rican family poverty is especially severe.** In 1992, two-fifths of all Puerto Rican families (40.0%) lived in poverty, compared with just under one-third of all Hispanic families (29.0%), one-eleventh of all White families (9.0%), and one-third of all African American families (31.0%).

▲ **Puerto Rican children suffer acute poverty, particularly when they live in single-mother families.** The significant proportion of Puerto Rican children who are poor is partly a reflection of family structure. For example, in 1991, 35.6% of all Puerto Rican families were poor compared to 66.3% of Puerto Rican female-headed households.

The factors associated with Latino poverty — including low educational attainment, concentration in low-wage work, growth in single-mother families, and discrimination — only partially explain the persistence of Puerto Rican poverty. According to the research, six principal factors help to explain the persistent poverty of Puerto Ricans:

▲ **Industrial and economic changes.** Research and analyses have illustrated that changes in the economy during the 1960s and 1970s

description of the Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty Project, please refer to Appendix I). This second and final report presents study findings, research highlights, and suggested community and policy actions to address the social and economic problems affecting Puerto Rican young men.[4]

While the socioeconomic problems facing Puerto Rican youth and their families are critical to the states and cities in which they live — particularly those highlighted here — the issues that help to explain their current status have implications for other urban population groups, including other Hispanics and African Americans. The information that follows underscores the need for involving Puerto Rican and other Latino perspectives in current policy debates regarding urban poverty, single-mother families, and non-college bound youth. This research also suggests that program and policy changes will be required in order to level the playing field for young Puerto Rican men and give them a fair chance at adult success.

Puerto Rican Poverty?

greatly affected the Puerto Rican community. The loss of hundreds of thousands of low-skill, well-paid manufacturing jobs, especially in the Northeast where Puerto Ricans are concentrated, displaced Puerto Ricans from their niche in the economy; as a group, they have not recovered.

- **Changes in skill requirements.** A growing service sector economy has increased the labor market demand for higher literacy and numeracy skills; for undereducated, low-skilled segments of the population, like Puerto Ricans, the transition to such jobs has been particularly difficult.
- **Gaps in educational attainment between Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanics.** Over the past two decades, Puerto Ricans have made gains in their educational attainment, as measured by median years of school completed. However, high school drop out and high school and college completion data show that there are still wide educational disparities between Puerto Ricans and non-Hispanics which put Puerto Ricans at a disadvantage when competing for jobs.
- **Change in family structure.** The proportion of female-headed households among Puerto Rican families has increased in the past decade; numerous studies have documented that such families experience higher rates of family and child poverty than two-parent families, and that Puerto Rican single mothers tend to have limited work experience and rely disproportionately on public assistance.
- **Unstable attachment to the labor force.** Puerto Ricans have experienced changes in their labor force participation rates over the past 20 years. For many reasons, Puerto Rican men are less likely than White or Black males to be working or looking for work and more likely to experience higher unemployment rates than Whites, other Hispanics, and, in some areas, Blacks.
- **Geographical location and concentration.** Recent research has begun to examine the labor market experiences of the mainland Puerto Rican population based on the areas of the country in which they reside — primarily the Northeast and Midwest — which have been especially affected by economic changes and which offer Puerto Rican workers poor employment opportunities.

Source: Excerpted from *Moving From the Margins: Puerto Rican Young Men and Family Poverty, Washington, D.C.:NCLR, August 1993*; additional sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1992*, Washington, D.C. July 1993; and *Black Population in the United States: March 1992*, Washington, D.C. September 1993.

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Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty: Bridging Research and Reality

Previous research on Puerto Rican poverty conducted by NCLR, particularly as it affects young males, indicates that:*

- Education is one of the most critical factors in determining the economic outcomes of young Puerto Rican men.
- Male unemployment, insufficient work experience, and limited connection to the work force may be greater factors in Puerto Rican poverty than low wages.
- Changes in the economy — from high-paying, low-skilled jobs to low-paying, higher-skilled jobs — help to explain the labor force status of Puerto Rican young men.
- Employment discrimination, which affects the job opportunities and earnings of young Puerto Rican males, contributes to Puerto Rican poverty.
- Delinquency, crime, incarceration, and related issues seem to play a still misunderstood role in the socioeconomic status of Puerto Rican young men and their families.

Using these research conclusions, the focus group interviews on which this report is based were structured around the topics of education and employment (see Appendix II for a copy of the questionnaire used to guide the interviews). Part of the key to reducing persistent poverty among Puerto Rican families is to increase the education levels of Puerto Rican young men in order to enhance their employability. Since the majority of young Puerto Rican men do not enroll in college, it is, therefore, critical that attention be paid to young men in high school and those moving out of their teenage years. With this in mind, the NCLR Poverty Project sought to determine the issues that characterize the school and work experiences of Puerto Rican males between the ages of 16 and 24.**

Although the focus group discussions were structured to gain understanding of the young men's school and work experiences, the issues that participants raised ranged from those related to families and neighborhoods to selling drugs and future goals. Issues of self-worth, identity, and stereotypes surfaced almost immediately in all groups. Similarly, the young men expressed frustration at the lack of role models in their communities and were especially interested in establishing connections with Latino professionals. With respect to education, the young men were keenly aware of the poor quality of their schools compared to suburban schools. They indicated that their relationships with teachers were mixed, and pointed to social and economic reasons for dropping out of school.

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* Adapted from *Moving from the Margins, op. cit.* for additional information, please refer to Sonia M. Pérez and Deirdre Martinez, *State of Hispanic America 1993: Toward a Latino Anti-Poverty Agenda*, Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, July 1993.

** For some Puerto Rican young men, this age range presents a final opportunity to provide them with meaningful school, work, and life options. For a complete discussion of the importance of examining and addressing problems of this age group, see *Moving from the Margins, op. cit.*

Despite their generally mediocre school experiences, the focus group participants who had goals for the future tended to think like their middle-class peers, in that they wanted careers, homes, and families. However, in most cases, they were not taking the steps that would allow them to realize their ambitions. For some, they were not always confident that they could reach those goals. As a whole, they were clear about both their commitment to the Puerto Rican community and their sense about how to improve their lives.

The following section presents the findings from focus group discussions with Puerto Rican young men in four cities: Brooklyn, Boston, Chicago, and Newark. The findings are organized by the major themes that emerged from the discussions: Families and Neighborhoods, Reflections on School, Work Experiences, the Impact of Drugs, and Future Goals. These are followed by a summary of the interviews with community-based practitioners who work with and serve Puerto Rican young men.

Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty

Recent research shows that:

- **Puerto Ricans have lower educational attainment than Whites and African Americans, but have higher education levels than Hispanics, as a whole.** Education data from 1992 show three-fifths of Puerto Ricans over 25 (60.5%) were high school graduates compared to over four-fifths of Whites (83.4%), over two-thirds of African Americans (70.0%), and just over half of all Hispanics (52.6%). Similarly, college completion rates for Puerto Ricans are lower than those of their racial and ethnic counterparts. In 1992, one in 12 Puerto Ricans (8.4%) had completed college, while one in 11 Hispanics (9.3%), one in eight African Americans (11.9%), and one in four Whites (23.4%) were college graduates.
- **Low education and high poverty are closely linked, particularly among Puerto Ricans.** In 1992, more than half of Puerto Rican householders (53.9%) that did not complete high school were poor. By contrast, 37.9% of Latino, 30.9% of African American, and 8.9% of White householders with no high school diploma were poor.
- **The labor force participation rate for Puerto Rican men is close to that of African Americans, but lower than that of White and Hispanic men in general.** In 1992, 70.3% of Puerto Rican men age 16 and over were participating in the labor force, compared to 69.7% of African American, 76.4% of White, and 79.6% of all Hispanic males.
- **The unemployment rate of Puerto Rican males remains higher than that of Hispanics or Whites.** Over the past decade, the Puerto Rican male unemployment rate has been 10.0% or higher, while that of Whites has averaged 5.6%. In 1992, Puerto Rican men had an unemployment rate of 14.1%, the same as African American males. In comparison, the unemployment rates that year were 12.2% for Hispanic and 6.5% for White males.
- **Data show that employed Puerto Rican males have higher median earnings than Hispanic or African American males, but lower earnings than White men.** In 1991, Puerto Rican males had median earnings of $18,256, compared to $14,503 for Hispanic men. African American and White males had median earnings of $12,962 and $21,395, respectively, that same year.

Source: Pérez, Sonia M., *Moving from the Margins: Puerto Rican Young Men and Family Poverty*, Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, August 1993.

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FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

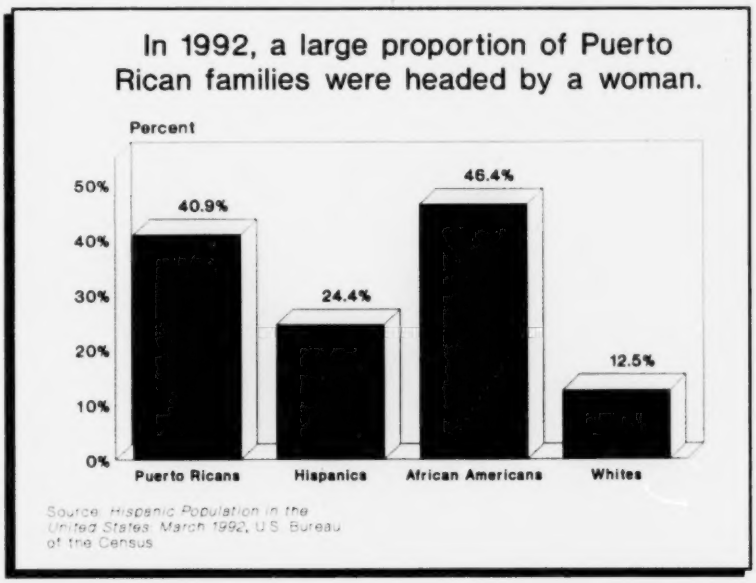
Families and Neighborhoods

Families are the cornerstone of communities, cities, and the nation as a whole. Research has shown both that a socially and economically stable family is a key predictor of school and adult success, and that the structure of families in the U.S. is changing. These changes have been reflected in the Puerto Rican community. In 1971, for example, a greater proportion of Puerto Rican families with children was headed by two parents.[5] By contrast, in 1992, 40.9% of all Puerto Rican families with children were being supported by a single mother and two-thirds (66.3%) were poor.

In addition to stable families, poverty research has shown that neighborhoods are critical to youth development.[6] A child's or youth's surroundings help to determine the quality of his/her school as well as the availability of recreation, social, and job opportunities. For poor families, their children, and for Puerto Ricans, in particular neighborhoods tend to be unsafe areas of concentrated poverty, often with inferior housing and other structural problems (For a descriptive profile of the four cities in which this project was focused, see Appendix III — City Profiles).

An additional concern in such neighborhoods is the disproportionately small number of working adults and professionals. The absence of a middle or working class has been shown to have a negative impact on such communities, beyond economics. For example, young people grow up without knowledge of jobs or job contacts, and without social networks or support.[7]

In discussions about families and communities, Puerto Rican young men focus group participants cited three key sets of concerns. First, they talked about the difficulties of living with one parent or in working poor families in which parents were absent because of their job schedules. Second, they were both angry at and worried about the absence of resources in their neighborhoods, which they believed provided no alternatives to risky behavior. Third, among the missing community resources they believed were most important: limited or no contact with Latino professionals.



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Discussion

Young Puerto Rican men face challenges in their two primary settings: home and neighborhood. Many live in one-parent families, typically with their mothers, which presents a range of problems: high poverty, insufficient guidance, and, especially for young men, no father figure. Even those in two-parent families must cope with the absence of parents as a result of work schedules and economic instability. These problems are exacerbated by neighborhoods which offer few social supports.

The need for role models stands out as one of the most important supports that is missing for many poor young Puerto Rican men. Since young people imitate the behaviors that they see around them, without role models, Puerto Rican youth who live in areas that are economically disadvantaged have difficulty knowing what is expected of them and do not always know what steps to take to make the transition from school to work. Unstable family situations can create further stress. By contrast, White, middle-class youth, who are surrounded by role models in professional careers, are expected to stay in school; for these youth, the transition to adulthood involves fewer obstacles.

In part, the link to role models or professional Latinos can be provided by community-based organizations (CBOs) and programs. CBOs play a critical role in the development of youth, especially Latino and other minority youth because they supplement the roles of traditional institutions and agencies, which often have not welcomed or effectively addressed the needs of young Puerto Rican men. They also have been instrumental in addressing a range of

Insufficient Adult Guidance

Most of the people here don't even live with their father, they live with their mother or their grandmother or they live by themselves. So they need someone to tell them, you know, you could do it, go out there and achieve it...but mostly out there, almost everyone is sellin' drugs. Ain't nobody out there pushin' me to do anything, so you got friends out there pushin' you to sell more drugs ...

— Boston, age 23

What I've seen is...in a lot of families, a real strong sense of family, and [negative things] could happen not because the parents are irresponsible, but you know, the way...some parents have to work late night shifts until midnight and sleep during the day...you know because, they can't find another job, you know, it's not like suburbia, nine to five [jobs] where you come home and you eat with your kids. No...the families that I know, the fathers go to work at, you know, like, at midnight, and come home during the day, they're sleeping when the kids come home...so that causes a lot of problems...especially for the younger ones who are so impressionable...

— Chicago, age 24

Where I live, there's a lot of single [mother] family homes and most of them, their children are not in school 'cause they're looking for jobs to help support the family...

— Newark, age 17

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other issues including developing self-esteem, completing school, and providing recreational and other alternatives to gangs and drugs. Now, community-based organizations must also address other barriers to educational attainment and successful employment which include delinquency, crime, and incarceration.

To enable them to provide services, like tutoring or mentoring programs that rely on successful Latinos and guide young Puerto Rican men into higher education or the work force, CBOs need financial and other support from cities and states in which they are located. Often, however, during times of economic difficulties, such funds are the first to be cut. As an example, the city of New York has recently proposed to reduce funding for youth programs.[8] Such measures send a signal that local governments do not value youth and are not committed to making investments in them. They also are sure to have a severe impact on both young Puerto Rican men and their families at a time when they urgently need support.

While many of the problems facing Puerto Rican youth are felt primarily at a local level, the federal government has a role to play as well. With respect to urban areas, in particular, initiatives like the Urban Recreation and At-Risk Youth Act and increased funding for employment and economic develop-

Poor Neighborhoods with Few Resources

I think they should put more money into our community, like they do in the suburbs. Maybe things will change a little bit, you know? Like, if they give us more attention and they pay more attention to communities...where drugs are an everyday thing there...maybe things will slow down, a little bit. Things like, more projects for other people that need housing, you know? Like, try to make more peace, maybe things will change, things will be a little more different. People could breathe better, a lot of people won't be as frustrated as they are now. 'Cause there's a lot of kids now, that just do anything, just to do it, 'cause nobody don't help them. So, they're like [expletive] it, nobody don't give a [expletive] about us, so let's not give a [expletive] about anybody....

— Boston, age 16

Why did we turn to drugs, why did we turn to the easy way out, why is there a lot of dropouts? Because there are no positive outlets period, you see what I'm saying? If you compare the Puerto Rican community with other communities, 'Junior over here is having a hard time in school. I'll send him to Europe for the summer, so he can get a little bit of culture.' Or if Sue over here is having a hard time 'I'll send her to the boarding school.' But if Papo is having a hard time, send that [expletive] to the corner. The problem is there is no positive outlets, there is no positive role models, there's nothing positive period...

— Brooklyn, age 24

They had Chicago Boys and Girls Clubs. Those helped, I'm not saying that they don't, but there's not enough of them. There's too much activity going on around these corners. Some of these parks don't have basketball nets up...things that [Puerto Rican youth] could be keeping their minds busy with, activities going on at the park houses, fun stuff...boxing, wrestling. Things like that will let out frustrations that won't be held up inside...to be taken out on another person...

— Chicago, age 24

ment programs, like Youth Build, are important steps toward rebuilding and enhancing the infrastructure of poor neighborhoods and providing economic opportunities for Puerto Rican youth and their families.

Limited Contact with Latino Professionals

I can guarantee there's Puerto Ricans out there that have...those high positions that...have become successful. I think what we need is for [Puerto Rican professionals] to be more accessible to us...we need more, absolutely more, role models.

— Newark, age 22

I think one of the problems with our community with poverty is the fact that people are leaving. You go to other communities...they still have their doctors and they still have their lawyers. When people get education, when people get phat jobs, they're out, you see what I'm saying, and we're still impoverished. There are no positive role models in our neighborhood. Because [the attitude is] 'if I get my degrees, I'm out'...

— Brooklyn, age 23

A lot of people just leave and forget where they came from.

— Brooklyn, age 22

I think that if there's a positive Puerto Rican role model, that can install different thoughts in our heads instead of all the violence that we're used to...to get positive energy instead of all this negative energy we have...

— Boston, age 24

They've [Puerto Rican young men] never seen anybody have a good future. No role models...the Puerto Ricans that make it, you know, they leave our society, they don't go back to our society and give back.

— Newark, age 19

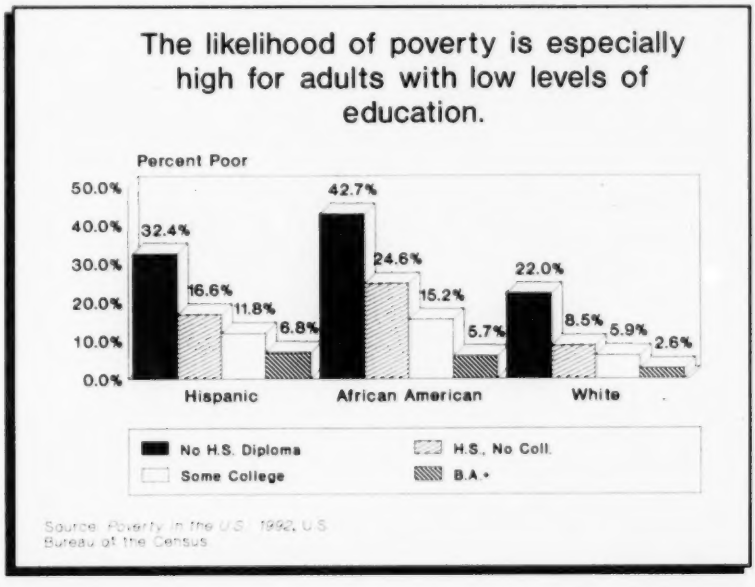
Reflections on School

The school years are a critical period in the lives of children and youth. Not only do young people spend a significant portion of their day in school, research has shown that school completion and success, as well as higher levels of educational attainment, are increasingly integral to future economic stability. Policy makers and employers have begun to pay attention to the school experiences of minority youth partly because population projections show that early in the next century, one in every three workers will be Latino, African American, Asian, or American Indian.[9] Additionally, the Latino youth population is expected to increase by 13 million by 2020, while Black and other minority youth populations will grow by 2.6 million and 1.2 million, respectively; by contrast, the White youth population is expected to decline by 6 million during this time period.[10]

The educational challenges facing Latino youth, in particular, deserve urgent attention; as a group, Latinos enter school later, leave school earlier, and receive proportionately fewer high school diplomas and college degrees than other Americans.[11] Low education levels continue to be a serious factor in Latino poverty since research has shown that education is the most significant determinant of employment status and earnings.[12]

While data show that levels of education among Puerto Ricans have increased over the past decade, the gap between Puerto Rican educational attainment and that of their non-Hispanic peers remains wide. As a result, Puerto Rican youth are at a disadvantage compared to White youth in terms of work-force competitiveness. In 1992, three-fifths of Puerto Ricans age 25 and over (60.5%) had a high school diploma, compared to more than four-fifths (83.4%) of non-Hispanic Whites. Similarly, 8.4% of Puerto Ricans age 25 and over had completed college relative to 23.4% of their non-Hispanic White counterparts.

In addition to strict measures of educational attainment, Puerto Rican youth face other problems in school. A recent report on Latino youth in New York City — where half the students are Puerto Rican — indicates that school drop out, "tracking" in non-academic course work, and segregation are serious problems for Latino students.[13]



As a result, discussions related to school were a major part of the focus group interviews. Overall, partici-

pants had poor school experiences partially because they believed that school was not always a safe place for them. In fact, fear of violence was a factor that kept many of them from attending school regularly; for others, it effectively caused them to drop out. Their discussion centered primarily on three topics: relationships with teachers, relevance of course work, and the importance of school. Puerto Rican young men's relationships with teachers or other school personnel varied by age; young males over 20 recounted more negative experiences with teachers, while those under 20 were generally positive in their remarks. While they all expressed concern over the lack of Puerto Rican or other Latino teachers, some had positive relationships with non-Latino teachers. As a group, however, they believed that teachers did not want to teach them. Both school environment and no connections to teachers fueled their decisions to drop out. In addition, they did not believe that what they were learning in school was relevant to either their current or future lives. Many questioned how their curriculum

Relationships with Teachers

...in my school...more of our teachers care about the students...they outweigh the ones that don't care. All the years that I've been in high school, I've never encountered a teacher that didn't care whether I learned or not...I think most of them [teachers] care, or they wouldn't have gotten in the teaching profession.

— Newark, age 17

...My two math teachers [are my role models], 'cause, like, they're not Hispanic or anything, but they motivated me and give me inspiration to go on.

— Newark age 16

I think you can really find them [the good teachers], in [special] programs.. Those teachers, sit down with you, even if they have to sit down with you for 15, 20 minutes, explain it to you the best way you know how. If you don't understand it, then they will try to explain the way you understand it...for me, those are the best schools to go to, you got more private time with the teacher...it's probably five or six kids in one classroom. It's easier for her to work with all the kids, and learn more 'cause you have more time with the teacher. She's explaining [everything] to you without leavin' out [what she taught] before...[some teachers go on even if] you don't even know the first part and she's already telling you the second part...

— Boston, age 19

I think they tend to deal less with kids like us, you know...actually I should say like me. When I was in school, I felt like teachers didn't even want to deal with me, and if I didn't want to do something, they'd just leave me off to the side, and they didn't deal with me at all. They'd say, 'just sit there and don't cause any trouble, you'll be alright'...

— Boston, age 22

... a lot of the teachers will only make the effort to keep you in school if you're in the top of the class, if not, they'll just throw [you out]...one less to deal with in the class.

— Chicago, age 24

was applicable to the world of work. In fact, most of the young men did not view school and course curriculum as preparation for future work. In contradiction, however, many of the young men thought that school was important to their future success.

Discussion

School is perhaps the most important area, outside of family, that influences the development of Puerto Rican young men. For many young Puerto Rican men, a combination of factors contributes to their poor school experiences — a problem with long-lasting impact since many tend to leave school before graduating or not attend college. As research has shown, however, higher levels of education translate into a broader and more promising range of economic opportunities, including higher income, job stability, greater labor market mobility, and low unemployment. It is critical, then, to increase education levels and higher education opportunities for Puerto Rican young men, partly as a way of reducing Puerto Rican family poverty.

Irrelevant Course Work

I think that we shouldn't be learning about history, we should [be] learning about now, what's goin' on today. 'Cause [what happened] back then, doesn't really matter...

— Boston, age 16

A lot of the time you're...in high school, you're just...like, 'what am I doing here? I'm just studying and getting all these grades. What am I taking all these courses for? Do I really need them in life? No.'

-- Brooklyn, age 16

In addition, while Puerto Rican young men believe school to be important, they do not fully understand the link between their current school experiences or status and their future economic stability. Focus group findings show that they are willing to accept some responsibility for their educational experiences but, in many ways, do not feel supported.

The Importance of School

I didn't want to be in school, I didn't want somebody tellin' me what to do. I wanted to do what I wanted to do, you know? It basically affected my life a lot, because here I am today, without many open windows. I closed a lot of windows on my own.

— Boston, age 22

The only way you can get anywhere in life is through an education. That way you don't have someone over you telling you what to do...you know, you can dictate your own life. It's the only way, an education...

— Newark, age 22

Poor relationships with their teachers clouded their perception

of education. This link appears to overwhelm their school experiences and is an important factor that discourages them from making an effort. Data from the U.S. Department of Education show that 2.9% of all teachers in the nation are Latino which suggests the need for more Hispanic personnel.

Additionally, the discussion also indicated that other issues related to school are important. For example, Puerto Rican young men, especially those that are growing up in single-parent families may need specific services and support to help guide them through high school, into college or stable work, and prevent them from dropping out.

Dropping Out

I think one main factor, going back to the single parents, 'cause a lot...I know quite a few people that were forced to have to get a job. And as a result of it, they couldn't handle the stress from going to school and having a job at the same time, so some just left 'cause they had to be the father figure in the house...

— Newark, age 19

I didn't have enough credits to graduate on time. I wasn't really serious, you know, I wasn't sure at one point, but then after a few years...that's when the counselor told me, 'you don't have enough credits to graduate right on time,' so I [had to go to school] a couple of more years. Forget it, I just dropped out.

— Chicago, age 24

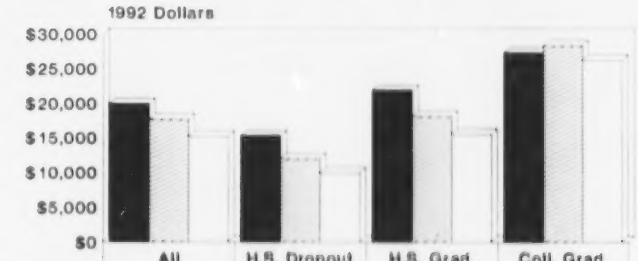
...As far as education, if you don't know what you want to do, what exactly it is you're planning on doing, or where you want to go with your life, you're not gonna be able to [make it].

— Brooklyn, age 16

Work Experiences

Movement into the work force is a critical step as young men become adults. Although the current labor force has begun to grow stronger relative to the last few years, it is the product of great economic change which has had a devastating impact on the Puerto Rican community. Unlike in the past, stable, high-paying jobs require strong educational preparation or specific training. Moreover, many jobs have left central cities — where Puerto Ricans are concentrated — for outer areas. Both new skill requirements and high unemployment where they live have limited the jobs young Puerto Rican men can get and hold. Yet, for Puerto Ricans, a strong connection to the work force is a crucial element in reducing Puerto Rican family poverty.

Regardless of education levels, earnings of young men, age 20-29, have declined over the past decade.



	All	H.S. Dropout	H.S. Grad.	Coll. Grad.
1979	$19,822	$15,233	$21,756	$27,244
1989	$17,712	$11,967	$18,133	$28,260
1992	$15,164	$9,924	$15,488	$26,183

Source: The State of America's Children Yearbook 1994, Children's Defense Fund

Focus group participants who had held jobs or were currently employed indicated that they worked primarily in the service/retail industry; as examples, some named liquor and shoe stores, delicatessens, and United Parcel Service shipping. Because most did not know or have contact with professionals, they looked for jobs through the newspaper or applying directly at stores they were familiar with. Others who had employed friends sometimes used these networks, but those jobs tended to be low-paying or part-time. They cited three principal concerns with gaining work experience: barriers to finding jobs, which included limited skills, discrimination, and lack of contacts; lack of training opportunities; and lack of jobs.

Available Jobs

...Touching back to what you said before, you know, what kinds of jobs the youth are qualified for. If they do go work at a, suppose a clothing store, they also have to dress nice...They have to have money to invest into a wardrobe. I mean, to be a good salesman, you have to look good, you have to look presentable. Not everybody has the opportunity to go buy nice clothes, and working at McDonald's, sure it's a job, you can't knock it, you have to earn your living, I guess. It's the stereotype of working at a fast food place that really discourages the young people ...

— Chicago, age 24

Discussion

Focus group participants faced multiple barriers to employment, including limited education, few job skills, concentration in areas with high unemployment, and weak networks. Together, these factors translated into poor economic prospects. Many young men, as a result grew discouraged; some gave up looking for employment, were not in school, and were, in effect, idle. Others looked to what they believed was the only option available for them to make money: selling drugs.

Most of these obstacles can be addressed through both locally-based and policy intervention. On a local level especially, young Puerto Rican men need recognition to affirm their value to communities; city officials, employers, and policy makers must begin to believe and communicate that Puerto Rican young men have aspirations, but need support. For many young men, a sense of hopelessness or futility was

Limited Skills

They mostly hire by experience...you got no experience, they'll be takin' a big risk, they gotta train you and all that. A lot of employers, don't want to be doin' all that training stuff, they want someone who knows what they're doin'. It's better to get a job than sell drugs...then you get more experience.

— Boston, age 23

Maybe they're [Puerto Rican young men] looking for work, just to get some money, they're not planning on going to college, because they have to help their family. So they don't think about going to college and getting a better job or continuing their education to get a degree. They'll just think along [service sector and blue-collar] types of jobs, and if they're not able to get them, some of them turn to selling drugs or, I mean, they feel discouraged after not being able to get a certain number of jobs and forget it.

— Chicago, age 24

Discrimination

*...there's a lot of racism in this country. Like, when you go to [fill out] the application, if you aren't White, they don't take you...I don't know, in this country, Puerto Ricans are rejected...it's a problem that worries me a lot.**

— Boston, age 20

I think it's also the stereotype, you see. Young Hispanic person, they think, 'Oh, you know these kids. All they do is hang out in gangs,' or whatever. There's that stigma that all Puerto Rican youth are, or at least most of them are, in gangs, or they use drugs and the employers may not want to take a chance of them not being reliable.

— Chicago, age 24

* Translated by the authors

fueled by their belief that adults around them neither understand their needs nor care about their futures. Young Puerto Rican men need to receive more positive and hopeful messages from the adults with whom they are in contact about what they can and should accomplish; they must also sense that their neighborhoods and cities need them in the workforce.

To help reinforce understanding of and connection to the job market for Puerto Rican young men, schools must act on two fronts. First, both the absolute number and proportion of Puerto Rican students in college-track classes must be increased. Increasing educational attainment levels is paramount to the improvement of the socioeconomic status of the Puerto Rican community. Second, preparation and requirements for non-college bound youth must also be strengthened. Puerto Rican young men need more opportunities to gain work experience and learn about careers while

Lack of Training Opportunities

I was gonna join a computer class, they paid for it, too, they paid for your bus fare...even for your gas if you drive, but when I went to sign up it was already taken up. It wasn't just for Puerto Ricans it was for everybody, but it was too full. [They need] to have those for Latinos, for Puerto Ricans, but not too far away...

— Chicago, age 23

Training of the youth [is what we need], ten-key calculator, typing, just the basics, not major training, just the fundamentals, cash registers. Something that you could go in and the company doesn't really have to spend that much time in training you how to work a cash register, how to count change, for those that never dealt with money. That's time and money that a company or a store has to invest in training an employee. Now, if a person goes in there with that kind of skill, it's less money...for the employer, to pay out, and they could get them to work right away. So that's something that I think will hold the youth back. Because, if you go in there with some kind of training, or if you went into a training program and finished it, you're certified, well let's give him a try...

— Chicago, age 24

We don't have enough opportunities to do anything. We're not as fortunate...as other kids, you know? Probably when we come here [to the U.S.], some of the families, they got other families to help them out and give them a chance. Some of us don't have families like that...And we won't get the same chance like, probably, a Black kid would get from his father. 'Cause his father still wanted to be with his mom, whatever, and gave him money...and that's how they got this car, or that's how he got himself into college. You know, we don't have that many people to help us out...

— Boston, age 19

they are in high school so that they can better understand the importance of completing school; structured apprenticeships may be part of the answer.

Finally, at city, state, and federal levels, employment training policy changes can have an impact on the job skills and opportunities of Puerto Rican youth. To maximize participation in such programs, young Puerto Rican men must be effectively recruited; outreach through community-based organizations can strengthen these efforts. As focus group participants indicated, they are eager to take part in training but often need transportation and a stipend to support their participation. At a minimum, a combination of these measures are needed to reduce the barriers that young Puerto Rican men face as they seek to enter the labor market. Without a clear sense of how to proceed in the world of work, Puerto Rican young men and, in turn, their families will continue to struggle with a deteriorating socioeconomic status.

Weak Networks

I got what I would consider a very good job. But there's other kids that I know that have the credentials to get in, and the company's not hiring. I know that there are a lot of more friends of mine that are more qualified for the job than I am, and they would just be more glad to do it more than I'm glad to do it, and it's just that to get a job in this city is all about luck. I don't care...it's more about who you know than what you know...

— Brooklyn, age 24

Lack of Jobs

It goes back to education, too, you know, a lot of people don't, you know, get an education, so they can't get a good job. There's not that many jobs as it is, so if you don't have a good education, then there are a lot of jobs that you probably won't get ...

— Boston, age 16

I don't think there's enough jobs out there, 'cause I've been looking around. I'm working now but it took me a while to find what I got now...and if you do find a job, most of them are minimum wage, unless you have an education, unless you have a career or something. But I've been looking for a while, now I finally found me something decent but, I'm still looking for better, but there's not enough jobs out there...

— Chicago, age 24

I'm trying to get a job, and I'm having a hard time. I fill out applications and go to places, [but] I think I'm wasting my time...

— Boston, age 16

The Impact of Drugs

The impact of the sale and use of drugs has been a serious problem in minority and urban communities for decades. In the past ten years, however, the effects of drugs in neighborhoods throughout the U.S. have been widely reported. The perception now is that drugs — and their related problems — are a national crisis, no longer limited to certain neighborhoods or communities. Additionally, the influx of drugs has been accompanied by increased crime and violence that has been most harmful to young minority males and has overwhelmed and paralyzed urban areas.

During the focus group sessions, talk of selling — more than using — drugs permeated each discussion. Participants demonstrated both an attraction and resistance to selling drugs. While they recognized that selling drugs involved danger, even death, given the serious conditions of their environment and their education levels, they believed they had no other lucrative employment opportunities. Drug dealing was a normal part of their environment. While many indicated that it was accessible and easy, they also understood the implications for themselves, their families, and their communities. While the young men did not

Appeal

...Some of them [young men selling drugs], no one wants to give them a job. Some people, they look [for], a job, they can't get one. You know, some of them are trying to support their families.

— Newark, age 19

...Mostly it's all about money. There ain't enough people out there tellin' kids, you know, 'No, do this. This is the right way to do it, you know? [There are more people who] hold their hand and show them that it's more people out there sellin' drugs, take [their] hand quicker and, 'Right here. This is how you make your money. You could buy this fresh car, you could get all the girls you want, you could go anywhere you want, if you have money.' 'Cause you can't do nothin' without money. It's a simple fact. It's like you can go and get your education, but you got more people droppin' out and people tellin' you to do the wrong thing than the right thing. You got more people out there tellin' you sell the drugs, rob this store, steal them tires...

— Boston, age 23

...A lot of my friends now, that I grew up [with] as kids are drug dealers. They drivin' around with Mercedes Benz, Honda Accords, all hooked up. You know, you look at that and you wonder, I went to school, I'm gettin' nowhere in life. He's out on the corner selling drugs, why can't I do that? So you go out and you do it, you go out there and you sell your drugs, you make money, your pocket's this phat, you got your phat car, you got your nice looking girl, it's the easy way out. Why go to school and stay there and in the future you get nowhere? You get your high school diploma. So what? You work at McDonald's.

— Brooklyn, age 22

The problem I think, is that a lot of kids just don't care...about getting an education...would they rather go to school for another four years, and get maybe a $1500 a week? Or go on the street and still get a $1500 a week?...

— Brooklyn, age 17

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see selling drugs as a long-term option or career, they recognized that, once they were involved, it was difficult to break away. Moreover, the time spent selling drugs prevented them from gaining work experience or developing marketable skills.

Discussion

Selling drugs was once viewed as an inner-city problem; it has now become a major problem for the nation as a whole. To illustrate, one focus group participant said that the clientele of one of his friends who sold cocaine consisted of lawyers, doctors, and

Effects

You're takin' a risk with yourself. You could die or you could go to jail. You could be rich one day, and you'll be locked up the next or you'll be dead somewhere. I mean, selling drugs, you'll be happy one day and the next day you won't be nobody ...

— Newark, age 18

I was out there, before I started, like realizing, damn, this [drugs] is killing us and it's working not to our advantage but to someone else's advantage. I was doing all the things for money, to hang out, to feel like...there was nothing else to do.

— Brooklyn, age 24

[Selling drugs is] like a serious lack of self-discipline and self-respect, they go out and become drug dealers, I don't accept that at all, man. Because, I remember when I was unemployed for like, a year, and my family, we had no money, no money, but I never [sold drugs]. I had thoughts, but I was like, no, never, never, no, I would never do it. I've had offers. I've had friends come up to me, 'I have a cousin who's selling drugs you know, if you want to do it, blah, blah, blah...like no, well [expletive] yourself,' I ain't doin' that...it's called sacrifice, you know, you gotta bust your [expletive]. It's paying your dues, you know? Nothing comes easy in life, you just can't go and make the money easily, you know, taking the easy way out by selling drugs. That's a weakness...

— Brooklyn, age 24

The only thing that woke me up was my son. If it wasn't for my son, I'd be in the street right now selling drugs. 'Cause I felt I have to live for him. What role model am I gonna give him if I'm in jail?

— Brooklyn, age 22

other professionals. The drug trade is especially harmful for inner-city groups like Puerto Ricans because there is limited access to or funding for drug rehabilitation services, compared to other areas with more resources.

The findings related to school and work, suggest that the sale of drugs is directly connected to the educational and employment status of Puerto Rican young men; faced with low-quality schools, unsympathetic teachers, and limited employment options, the young men who sold drugs felt they were making the choice that gave them the best chance for immediate survival — even if that choice was not legal or ethical.

For policy makers and community leaders and workers, the findings suggest that it is not enough to extol the virtues of hard work and education; for many young Puerto Rican men, those are ideals that they often are not at liberty to have. Instead, policies and programs aimed at alleviating family poverty, reducing minority youth unemployment, and creating jobs are needed to provide alternatives to selling drugs. Schools also have a role to play in strengthening the connection between course work and jobs, and aggressively helping young Puerto Rican men to find jobs. As long as young Puerto Ricans view selling drugs as an employment option, the danger of increased involvement with the criminal justice system and the threat to the community from the violence of the drug trade remain real.

Future Goals

Most youth spend the period of adolescence and young adulthood planning for their futures and taking steps to achieve their goals. It is a time during which young people are expected to develop and adapt certain skills and behaviors in order to help integrate them into society. School work becomes more challenging and specific; and part-time jobs, internships, and other arrangements provide first-time work experience. This assumes, however, that young people feel secure in their self-worth as well as in their ability to fulfill their goals.

For many young Puerto Rican men, this foundation of confidence and future vision is not there. The way that many focus group participants viewed themselves, for example, was strongly influenced by how they believed others perceived them. They felt other people's image of Puerto Rican youth, especially male youth, was largely negative, based primarily on media portrayals, and experiences with school personnel and potential employers. It was compounded by few or no images — either in their communities or in the public — of positive, professional Puerto Ricans.

Yet, they did not seem to entirely blame others; they also shared responsibility for their future. Consequently, despite their limited social and economic opportunities, most focus group participants described hopes and plans strikingly similar to those of middle-class youth: having families, developing careers, and owning homes and businesses. Others did not look to the future at all; they focused on each day without thinking about long-term possibilities. One value that many shared was a sense of responsibility to help others in their communities; some had begun to "give back" by becoming involved with local organizations or pro-

Self-Image

If someone tells you 'you're stupid, you're stupid, you're stupid' your whole life, you might not like it. You might hate the fact that they call you stupid, but then you begin to believe it. Certain people do get over it, certain people see the light. Just because I'm Puerto Rican doesn't mean I'm stupid. But then, they'll try to get ahead in life, and then, they'll start getting kicked in the butt, they see that it's rougher, it's rougher for us. And then, they quit because they say I'm nobody, nobody in my family ever made it, it was stupid of me to even dream that I was ever gonna make it.

— Newark, age 19

...this society really doesn't do that much for you, you have to do it for yourself...we always use people as a scapegoat and we have to stop doing that because once we stop doing that, we start realizing we have to look out for ourselves.

— Brooklyn, age 22

...the media has a lot to do with it...they don't even promote Latin culture. They just promote the pop culture, which happens to be now White and African American. It [self-image] has a lot do with the media itself and the images they show. There is no image of Latinos, period.

— Brooklyn, age 24

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grams. As a group, however, many of the Puerto Rican young men seemed to question whether their dreams were reasonable and did not always know whether or how to satisfy their goals.

Discussion

Goals and plans are critical to youth development: if young people are going to make a smooth transition to adulthood, they need to have both enough confidence in themselves to develop goals and a belief that their futures are worth planning. Focus group findings indicate that young Puerto Rican men often lack these feelings. As a group, they had neither a strong sense of self or hope that they could realize their dreams. This perspective on the future contributed to poor or no planning, few effective strategies to generate or find opportunities, and no real sense of the path to adulthood — which in turn means that many of these youth are unprepared for work and unable to help support a family.

Focus group participants expressed aspirations and dreams for the future that parallel those of middle class youth. They were often idealistic about family life despite their own disappointments or realities; moreover, they were cognizant of giving back to their communities. However, they were not sure how to achieve those goals. This is due in part to the fact that young Puerto Rican men have limited or no contact with Latino professionals, either in their families or communities.

Without self-confidence, vision, and support, Puerto Rican young men may make no connection between their current activities, like school attendance or drug dealing, and their

Lack of Vision

I can't even take a rough guess about what the future holds for me, from my point of view I really can't guess...

-- Brooklyn, age 17

I see a rocky road ahead for me. I feel that being a Latino, Puerto Rican specifically, I'm cut off at the knees, I have to work twice as hard, as the White person does, to get the same job he's getting. I have to fight, I'm gonna get mine, I know that. I see things in a different way than most Puerto Ricans do. See, the dreams that Puerto Ricans have, 'yeah, I'm gonna have a nice little house on a hill in the suburbs...my neighbor Bob.' I don't see myself with that. I see myself living with Puerto Ricans for the rest of my life, people call it a ghetto, or whatever, those are my people and that's where I'm gonna stay.

— Newark, age 19

I don't even see myself in the future ...

— Brooklyn, age 22

Everything's going downhill... There's hardly any jobs, a lot of poverty, homeless... There ain't no future, we gotta take it day by day, that's how you live.

— Newark, age 18

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futures. This may result in hopelessness, feeling discouraged, and ultimately, dropping out of school. For those who do complete school but are not encouraged to pursue higher education, they are likely to remain at the lowest end of the economic scale since they face educational and other obstacles to professional careers. It is critical, then, that efforts to improve the employability of young Puerto Rican men include strategies to address these issues.

Jobs and Families

I plan to finish high school, and then go to college, and find a good job working [with] computers ...

— Chicago, age 19

I want to be the type of father that, when I wake up, I want to be the first one waking up, go to the store, buy the newspaper, get the breakfast and sit down with my son, my daughter, my wife, take them to school, and then go to work.

— Boston, age 19

I [want to give] to my son what I didn't get as I was growing up and make sure that his life, try to make his life easier than it was for me.

— Boston, age 19

When I have my kids, I want them to go to college and better the community.

— Brooklyn, age 18

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

The focus group findings suggest that Puerto Rican young men are eager to learn and work, but they are often unsupported in their efforts and lack guidance to achieve their goals. They express both idealism and hopelessness about their futures; although they want to work and have families, they do not believe that their futures are possible. They are also overwhelmed and troubled by, as well as easily vulnerable to, the pressures of their environment.

To help address some of the problems that they face — as well as fill gaps due to the unresponsiveness of mainstream services — Puerto Rican young men often rely on community-based organizations. CBOs have assumed a special responsibility and demonstrated their ability to successfully support Puerto Rican and other Latino youth as they make the difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood. CBOs provide a range of social, educational, and health services, as well as offer youth a sense of safety, stability, and hope for a variety of life options.

However, several problems have made the difficult tasks faced by CBOs even harder; changes in family structure, the rise in substance abuse, gang-related crime, and lack of economic opportunity strain CBO staff, resources, and budgets as they work to meet the challenges facing Puerto Rican and other poor youth.

The CBOs that participated in this study, ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey, Concilio Hispano, El Puente, and Youth Guidance, have experience working with Puerto Rican young men and offer them a range of services (see Appendix IV for a description of each of these organizations and the services they provide). Interviews with executive directors and CBO staff reinforced the issues and concerns that the young men raised in their focus groups. In particular, practitioners identified lack of strong male role models, low levels of education, inadequate job training, poor job prospects, and drug trafficking as the five most urgent problems young Puerto Rican men face. The following section provides greater detail on each of these major themes.

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Lack of Strong Male Role Models

The lack of positive, successful, male role models is a key factor in the poor socioeconomic status of Puerto Rican young men. A significant proportion of young Puerto Rican men are growing up in single-mother families which often face greater stress than two-parent families, including high poverty and residence in unsafe areas. While many focus group participants indicated that they had positive relationships with their mothers, service providers suggested that many of the young men also needed relationships with "father" or "authority" figures that they could respect and rely on to guide them to adulthood.

Without connections to positive adult males, CBO staff believed that young Puerto Rican men, already at a difficult developmental stage in their lives, were uncertain about their identity and their sense of responsibilities as men. For example, they indicated that a strong male presence can help to define boundaries, expectations, and values, and represents a source of motivation, leadership, and discipline. Moreover, young Puerto Rican men need examples of men who work legitimately and remain connected to their communities.

In the absence of such a figure, many young men attached themselves to the dominant figure in their environment; for many, this meant emulating negative role models, including drug dealers and pimps, and engaging in behaviors with potentially negative outcomes, such as criminal activity or drug dealing.

Conclusion

Puerto Rican poverty research has appropriately concentrated on improving socioeconomic indicators. For young Puerto Rican men, however, a key factor in their status that has not been adequately examined is the effect of growing up without strong connections to positive men. CBO staff who work with Puerto Rican young men suggest that the lack of such relationships can be harmful not only to their development but also to their life options and

> *Not having a father figure in the home is detrimental to the kids. For those without a father figure, they may look to the pimp or the drug dealer in the neighborhood. These kids will assume the values of the father figure they choose and that will lead them in the direction of that father figure.*
>
> — *Newark*
>
> *Young Puerto Rican men need to project some sort of independence, self-reliance, to be a man. When there are strong male role models, who are focused on male development, in the house, there is a stronger sense of what a man is.*
>
> — *Brooklyn*
>
> *Our young Puerto Rican men have not had intimate contact with Puerto Rican males who are successful. They only see a Puerto Rican lawyer when they're in trouble. [We are experiencing a] brain drain, as Puerto Rican professionals remove themselves from the day-to-day activities of the communities. If they meet Puerto Rican professionals, like social workers, it's at the point of purchase, not a social setting.*
>
> — *Brooklyn*

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choices. Young men who have little or no contact with their fathers need mentors, counselors, and other men who can help them make decisions, understand their history and traditions, support them in school, and help them find work. For those who face multiple barriers to social and economic success, such influences may keep them grounded and help them develop a strong sense of self which may enable them to make the right decisions when faced with adverse situations.

Low Levels of Education

The need to increase both the amount and quality of education that Puerto Rican young men receive is critical to improving their chances in the work force and their life options. In the four cities in which this study was conducted, Puerto Rican young men were likely to attend schools that were overcrowded, segregated, had few Latino personnel, had poor facilities and resources, and did not offer rigorous, college preparation courses. According to staff from community-based organizations, many students they knew did not believe that their education would prepare them for college or the job market; they did not see its value and were discouraged from making an effort.

During interviews, CBO staff noted two distinct concerns with respect to the education of young Puerto Rican young males: poor quality instruction and curriculum; and peer and family pressure to be out of school. In particular, service providers cited insufficient or underdeveloped writing and analytic skills as problems which impeded Puerto Rican young men's ability to compete in the job market. This deficiency was especially notable among young men who did go to college; they were forced to play catch-up with better-prepared peers or those from more affluent school systems — or drop out. Finally, some young men experienced peer pressure to be out of school; many others were expected to work to help support their families. This sense of urgency to enter the work force prevented them from either completing school or taking advanced course work.

> *Math and reading skills hold the kids back. They don't receive in-depth instruction in reading, writing, comprehending, computing, analyzing, on being a team player, and in higher order thinking. They have to be able to compute. As a comprehensive package, [the lack of these skills] singularly kills our own kids. The system is not structured to support any of these things in a structured way. Those people that make it will have children who can navigate the system.*
>
> — *Chicago*

> *The kids are half-proficient in one language, half-proficient in another, they have great interpersonal skills, but there is a necessity for increases or acquisition of other skills. You need people from the community that go beyond community college, that have developed their writing skills.*
>
> — *Brooklyn*

> *I think that many of the young people in the area do not seriously consider going on to complete a high school degree that will not do very much for them.*
>
> — *Newark*

> *[Puerto Rican young men's] parents were expected more to go to school. [Now] Puerto Rican young men are more expected to get a job than go to college.*
>
> — *Brooklyn*

> *I think young men are under a lot of pressure to be out of school. I think that they are under a tremendous amount of pressure to not be responsible or to not be faithful to their family.*
>
> — *Boston*

Conclusion

Strategies to improve the quality and levels of education young Puerto Rican men receive are urgently needed. Limited opportunities and success in the work force, high unemployment, and persistent poverty are associated with insufficient educational attainment. In particular, young Puerto Rican men should be better represented in advanced courses so that, even if they do not go to college, they can have a solid educational base with which to enter the labor force. Additionally, outreach and public information to help Puerto Rican families understand course work requirements, career paths, and job options, are sorely lacking.

Inadequate Job Training

Because many young Puerto Rican men do not receive adequate education or preparation for the job market, leave school before graduating, or do not have any work experience, job training programs can help develop critically-needed skills. Yet, NCLR and other research findings[14] have shown that Latinos are underrepresented in and not well served by federal employment and training programs.

Community-based practitioners that serve Puerto Rican youth echo these concerns. They stressed the need for a broader range of training opportunities, increased funding, and availability in areas where young Puerto Rican men live. Specifically, they identified the need to address several issues in order to make employment training more meaningful and effective for Puerto Rican young men.

First, they believed that some programs placed within CBOs were poorly developed, monitored, and funded. Consequently, such programs did not adequately provide concrete or marketable skills. This, in effect, left participants with a training program on paper, but no real job competency or prospects. Second, from the practitioners' experience, employment and training programs seemed to stress placement of clients in positions over the development of basic educational skills. With little regard to the level at which clients enter the labor market or to their ability to re-

> *"It's difficult [for them]; they want to get that job, but they need training and or they need their GED [and] they don't have it. You have to start from 'First, you have to get your GED in order for me to refer you to his program. I have a placement for a GED, would you be interested?' And it's like, 'No I really need a job right now, right away'*
>
> *— Chicago*
>
> *The thinking is, if you get them in a GED program, then get them into this training program, they'll hang on just long enough to finish it and they'll get a job. The emphasis is on getting a job now and forget about where they could be entering the job market.*
>
> *— Boston*
>
> *The employment program [here] gives the kids filing and maintenance jobs, but there's no real transference of skills. To accomplish that, the state would have to step in and help out.*
>
> *— Brooklyn*
>
> *Most young men aren't really attracted to GED programs, they're usually attracted to employment or vocational training programs because they just want a job.*
>
> *— Boston*
>
> *They [programs] want specific standards for their clients and they're not going to accept anyone who doesn't have a GED or who [doesn't] have certain skills that they require. Maybe there needs to be a pre-pre-training program, just to make sure that they're [Puerto Rican young men] prepared to enter the next step. That it's just not getting your GED. Your GED doesn't really prepare you as well as four years of school; it's just to get you by, [but] even that is not enough. You have to know how to read and write and understand materials."*
>
> *— Chicago*

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main employed, many participants were counted as having jobs but, months later, some were unemployed.

Another problem with many programs relates to outreach and participant understanding of outcomes. For many young Puerto Rican men, the most important determinant in whether they chose to participate was that it would lead them to a job. As a result, the young men often excluded themselves from GED programs which, from their perspectives, only provided education, not job training. They did not, however, consider or understand that GED preparation might improve their ability to participate, as well as their performance, in employment and training programs.

Conclusion

Locally-based programs designed to improve the work skills and enhance the employability of Puerto Rican young men are critically needed. For a number of reasons, existing programs do not serve Latino youth well; targeted outreach and increased funding may help to address some of these concerns. In addition, a broad range of programs are needed to both meet the diverse needs of young Puerto Rican men and satisfy the segments of the economy that are experiencing job growth. Finally, employment training programs should emphasize the development of strong literacy and numeracy skills in order to ensure Puerto Rican young men greater stability in the labor force.

Poor Job Prospects

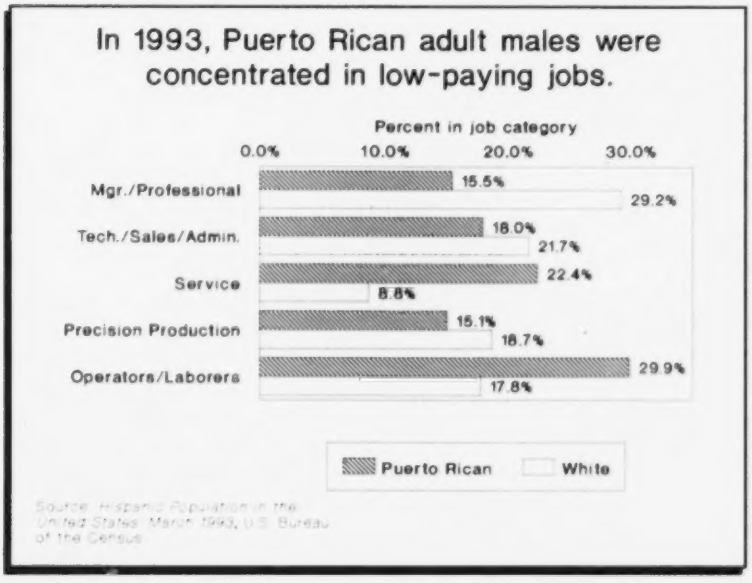
A substantial proportion of young Puerto Rican men face limited employment options. For those without a high school diploma or college degree, the only employment available are low-paying, low-benefit service sector or part-time jobs. In addition, while many youth rely on networks of friends or family members to aid in their job search, the working adults that young Puerto Rican men tend to know are concentrated in similarly unstable, low-income work or in industries which are shrinking.

Community-based workers agreed that improving work options for young Puerto Rican men was essential to their future economic stability and the status of their families. They raised concerns related to limited work experience or skills, inadequate educational preparation, poor behavioral work skills that interfered with the ability to maintain a job, and few contacts that could help young men find jobs.

> *"Work options open to most of these young men are entry-level, primarily service sector jobs, especially for those with only a high school diploma or a GED.*
>
> *— Chicago*
>
> *They don't have adequate pre-employment skills....Many of the young men have a conflict with authority and the schools don't teach formal conflict resolution. This is one of the reasons why our kids lose so many jobs. I think these young men are very immature youngsters and [for them] weapons become power and somehow they think that they rectify whatever the conflict is on the spot.*
>
> *— Chicago*
>
> *Often basic skills, like writing skill are lacking. Employable skills need to be stressed [in training programs].*
>
> *— Brooklyn*
>
> *Their understanding of how to break into non-service sector jobs needs to be addressed as their network only concentrates on service sector jobs. They need to learn what it takes to get by...it can be paralyzing for them if they realize too late. There is a great need for transferable skills in the community setting.*
>
> *— Brooklyn*
>
> *If you don't get more training, more education, more experience, there's not much that's out there."*
>
> *— Chicago*

Conclusion

The difficult task of job creation must be tackled to enable young Puerto Rican men to have confidence in the job market and prevent them from turning to lucrative — but illegal — "employment." Currently, Puerto Rican and other young minority males face poor job prospects. Limited education, few opportunities for training or learning skills, stereotypes held by potential employers, and a lack of jobs in areas where they live result in high unemployment and discouraged youth. In addition to the need for increased opportunities to gain job market experience and develop work skills, Puerto Rican youth need stronger connections to professional workers and sectors of the economy.



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Drug Trafficking

In the absence of positive influences, many young Puerto Rican men with poor educational outcomes and weak job options choose to sell drugs. For many, the tension between "easily" earning large sums of money in a short amount of time or struggling to survive a faulty educational system and hoping to get a job paying more than five dollars per hour is overwhelming. Their choice is often affirmed when they see others who have completed high school unemployed or in low-paying jobs.

In some cities, especially Chicago, young Puerto Rican men are embraced by gangs who serve as a surrogate family and promote drug trafficking. They become integrated into an alternative culture which supports values that conflict with those they know; but, within this culture, they are able to find respect, loyalty, and economic security. For young Puerto Rican men in most cities, one reason why it is so difficult to resist selling or using drugs is because it is a visible, accessible part of their reality.

Conclusion

Puerto Rican young men who grow up in poor neighborhoods and inner cities are bombarded with negative influences, including the attraction of selling drugs. For many who believe that there are no alternatives, drug trafficking provides financial support and a sense of power. Yet, drug use and sales are one of the most dangerous threats to Puerto Rican young men, their families, and neighborhoods. These young men urgently need stronger, more positive influences, as well as a clear understanding of both the impact of drugs and the path to educational attainment and legitimate work.

> *Violence and drugs cause many Hispanics to not go to school...The financial incentive drives many of them to sell drugs and they want to make the money fast. Someone who's honorable and respectable barely has enough to feed their own. I think some kids look for an escape from the reality of the pain that they're going through, they're looking for a way out, to get away.*
>
> — *Newark*
>
> *Drugs and crime are a fact of life [for the young men].*
>
> — *Brooklyn*
>
> *I think young men see more of a need to be cool and using drugs can be used to impress the people they hang out with. I think the young women don't have that same pressure to play the cool role as the young men.*
>
> — *Newark*
>
> *The substance abuse...it's all over the place.*
>
> — *Boston*
>
> *They [gangs] teach the young men gang values, nurture them, even give them economic assistance, and completely integrate them within the gang familia.*
>
> — *Chicago*

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CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Puerto Rican young men aged 16 to 24 face serious obstacles as they move into adulthood and make the transition from school to work. Aggregate, quantitative research shows that Puerto Rican youth on the U.S. mainland tend to grow up in single-mother families, have parents with lower levels of education than their White counterparts and, live in central cities where resources are scarce and economic opportunities are limited. They are also likely to be overrepresented in poor schools that, for a variety of reasons, do not provide a rigorous education. This qualitative study confirms these findings and suggests that both policy and community-based changes are needed to enhance education and employability for Puerto Rican young men.

Focus group discussions and interviews with community-based organization staff in four cities point to several key issues that need to be addressed to improve future outcomes of Puerto Rican youth. First, poor neighborhoods with few resources have played a major role in shaping the current socioeconomic status of Puerto Rican young men and their families. Yet, relatively little attention has been paid to the influence that a young person's external environment exerts on his/her adult life. Young Puerto Rican men are likely to live in and be affected by poor neighborhoods with low-quality schools, high unemployment, little connection to the work force, and high crime. The influence of poor neighborhoods on the outcomes of Puerto Rican youth merits greater attention.

Second, one of the most serious supports missing from the lives of young Puerto Rican men is contact with successful adult males. The limited presence, visibility, and support of positive male role models has had an especially negative impact on young Puerto Rican men and their families. Often, they have no contact with adult males who have finished school and have a job. Partly as a result, they do not learn how to make the transition from adolescence to adulthood in a responsible way.

Third, as the place where most youth spend a majority of their time outside of their homes, schools must address several concerns in order to better serve Puerto Rican youth. The principal factors that contributed to the poor school experiences of focus group participants include poor relationships with teachers, course work that was not connected to the job market, and fear of violence. Many young men chose to leave school early, despite the fact that they believed educational attainment was important to their economic status.

Finally, the sale of drugs in many communities where Puerto Ricans live threatens the safety and the future of Puerto Rican young men and their families. Drug trafficking and related problems, like crime, appear to have increased over the past decade in Puerto Rican communities. For young men with poor educational preparation, little job experience, no opportunities for work, and little hope, selling drugs has become an acceptable "lifestyle" alternative. Despite the fact that the safety of these communities is compromised daily by the sale of narcotics, neither communities nor governments have been able to arrive at broad effective solutions for this problem.

These issues suggest several major program and policy implications. First, on a local level:

- **The creation of active alliances between community-based organizations, corporations, and local businesses can help to increase employment opportunities for Puerto Rican youth.** Many Puerto Rican young men live in areas with limited economic resources; often, their connection to mainstream institutions is through community-based agencies. Partnerships between businesses and nonprofit organizations to improve work experience or skills, provide internships, hands-on-training, and employment opportunities are needed. Such arrangements would also supplement and provide creative alternatives to typically underfunded summer youth employment programs.

- **Community-based strategies are needed to establish or strengthen links between young Puerto Rican men and positive adult males.** The need for positive male role models for young Puerto Rican men who grow up in single-mother families is critical to their future outcomes. Without these role models, Puerto Rican young men may not be exposed to success in their community and may not make any connection between education and positive life options. Puerto Rican young men, therefore, are likely to emulate negative role models and engage in "risky" behaviors, such as selling drugs and dropping out of high school. Community-based programs which provide mentors to young men must be expanded. Additionally, efforts to encourage successful Latinos to remain in their communities are critical to reducing poverty among Puerto Rican families.

- **Urban schools with few resources can take measures to improve the educational experiences of young Puerto Rican men.** Despite their limited resources, schools in Puerto Rican communities can provide greater support to Puerto Rican students. For example, efforts to involve parents or guardians in the schools have proven to be effective in improving educational outcomes for students. In addition, the focus group findings suggest the need for strengthening the relevance of the curriculum and matching it to specific areas which are experiencing job growth and expansion. Apprenticeships — structured work placements which allow students to learn a specific job — are one way of facilitating the connection between school and jobs. Finally, the use of schools for after-hours and weekend activities is becoming increasingly common and strengthens relationships between communities and schools.

Second, from a public policy perspective:

- **Educational policy initiatives are needed to address the lack of both safety in urban schools and the numbers of Latino teachers.** No students, including Puerto Rican young men, should fear going to school. Safety standards should be delineated and enforced at every level of the school system to remove fear of violence as a barrier to school attendance and completion. In addition, focus group findings support the need for more Puerto Rican and Latino teachers and school personnel, who can reinforce models of success for Puerto Rican youth. Existing staff in cities with large numbers of Puerto Rican students need to learn more about Puerto Rican

families and the problems that they face in order to provide greater support of their students. However, to learn how to provide culturally sensitive and appropriate education to Puerto Ricans and their families, teachers themselves need training and support.

- **Federal efforts to improve school-to-work transitions and job training opportunities must target inner-city youth, especially Puerto Rican young men.** Latino and Black young males have the highest unemployment rates of any group in the country and face limited employment opportunities. Recent measures to enhance the employability of workers and youth entering the labor force, such as the Reemployment Act, must build on lessons learned from previous attempts. Programs should be designed to serve hard-to-reach youth and discouraged from "creaming," or serving only the brightest participants. Outreach methods must include strategies which target youth where they are — especially on the streets — since many are not connected to schools or other mainstream institutions. Additionally, inefficient administration of resources has hindered previous attempts to improve the socioeconomic status of youth. Policy makers must ensure that new proposals contain provisions to address these errors in implementation, as well as offer meaningful work skills and opportunities, transportation, and job placement. Newer approaches, including the use of apprenticeships to introduce youth to particular careers, may be very effective with young Puerto Rican men who do not pursue higher education.

- **Strategies to foster economic development and job creation are needed in areas where Puerto Rican youth live.** Education, job training, and the development of job skills are crucial, but for many young men there exist limited or no job opportunities in central cities. Policies are needed to address the lack of economic growth in urban areas and stagnating wages, especially among young minority men. Job creation poses perhaps the greatest challenge to improving the economic status of Puerto Ricans; transportation to areas where there are jobs may be part of the answer.

- **City and state budgets must allocate funds to provide youth with recreation, sports, and work activities to create positive options for their time after school.** Strong communities and those that are effective at helping youth stay in school, seek higher education, and join the work force, have resources that are absent in many inner-city and economically disadvantaged areas. Activities to supplement the school day, teach valuable skills, and increase contact with successful adults are needed to assist young Puerto Rican men in their development. Programs such as "midnight" basketball leagues, for example, can provide young Puerto Rican men with opportunities for recreation, positive social interaction, and contact with adult males.

- **Practitioners and policy makers must not forget young men as they design "prevention" and other programs for youth.** Current strategies designed to prevent school dropout and teenage pregnancy or teach parenting skills and provide employment training are overwhelmingly targeted to young women or young mothers; young men also need assistance and would benefit from such services. Programs

should be designed with a male component and aggressive outreach should be aimed at including Puerto Rican and other Latino young men.

Finally, all levels of society must take responsibility for drug use and sales. Young men with no means of economic support, no sense of their future or the steps needed to achieve their goals, and little social support, believe that selling drugs is "easy," "accessible," and "helps to support" their families. Until alternatives are presented to these men, they will continue to choose negative options.

The youthfulness of the Puerto Rican population and the growth of the larger Latino population have significant consequences for these groups — as well as for the cities and states in which they will play an increasingly important role. Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics represent a growing proportion of both the current and future U.S. labor force; as adults, they will work in and manage U.S. businesses, schools, hospitals, and governments. In an aging society, they represent a significant segment of taxpayers who will ensure the solvency of Social Security, Medicare, public assistance, and other government services.

While efforts to provide positive developmental opportunities at an early age should be pursued and promoted, especially for poor Puerto Rican children, communities and policy makers have an obligation to address the serious challenges facing this generation of Puerto Rican young men **now**. There is still an opportunity to motivate these young men as they make the transition to adulthood. More importantly, advocates, policy makers, and communities can not afford to simply "give up" on a whole generation of young men. Not only are they future workers and leaders, Puerto Rican young men also represent parents.

While some may say that resources currently are not available for this population, the evidence strongly indicates that a lack of attention will have greater long-term social and economic costs. Policy makers must listen to these young adult voices and work with the Latino community to assure that they and their children have equal opportunities for economic success as well as social stability. For the Puerto Rican young men who believe that "they don't want to give us a chance," communities, employers, and policy makers must help prove them wrong.

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Endnotes

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11. *State of Hispanic America 1991: An Overview*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza, February 1992; and "Economic, Labor Force, and Social Implications of Latino Educational and Population Trends," *op. cit.*

12. Mishel, Lawrence and David M. Frankel, *State of Working America*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, 1991; and Peter T. Kilborn, "For High School Graduates, a Job Market of Dead Ends," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1994.

13. *Toward a Vision for the Education of Latino Students: Community Voices, Student Voices*, Interim Report of the New York City Latino Commission on Educational Reform. Board of Education of the City of New York, May 1992.

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APPENDICES

I. Project Description and Methodology

The Puerto Rican Young Men and Poverty Project

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) conducted a two-year research and community-based study on mainland Puerto Rican family poverty with a specific emphasis on young Puerto Rican men between the ages of 16 and 24. The project's focus was on the education and employment issues affecting young Puerto Rican men's labor force status and their implications for Puerto Rican family poverty.

Labor force projections indicate that substantial job growth will occur in areas which require high levels of literacy and numeracy, which could lead to severe unemployment for Puerto Rican youth who do not complete college or get the training necessary for high-wage jobs. For young men specifically, low educational attainment adversely affects their economic status as well as their ability to support the families they help to create. Research also shows that low educational attainment has implications for their future choices, including their involvement in crime and delinquency. Taken as a whole, these issues underscore the need for more extensive research and policy attention on the particular circumstances that young Puerto Rican men face.

First year activities included:

- **Data collection to document the socioeconomic status of Puerto Rican young men and Puerto Rican families.** Collecting data on Puerto Ricans posed a serious problem as comparatively little data exist on Hispanic young men. More information is available on African Americans and Whites, and often, most socioeconomic comparisons only show data disaggregated by White or African American. Data by Hispanic subgroup are especially difficult to find, and when such data are available, they are rarely available by gender or by age. The data presented throughout both reports were collected from various federal agencies. In addition to national data, previous studies on Latino and Puerto Rican young men were used.
- **A Round Table discussion on the education and employment experiences of Puerto Rican youth.** The Round Table convened 24 leaders, researchers, and advocates from several states to discuss Puerto Rican family status, education, employment, and poverty trends. The discussion also included community challenges and responses to these issues and served to give a clearer direction to the subsequent phase of the project, the focus groups.
- **The preparation of a first-year report,** *Moving From the Margins: Puerto Rican Young Men and Family Poverty,* which contains a statistical overview, a research summary, and highlights from the Round Table.

Second-Year Methodology

The research for the second year included focus groups in four cities with Puerto Rican young men between the ages of 16 and 24. Focus groups are a data-gathering approach using non-randomly selected participants in moderated discussions to get feedback on various issues. They provide insight and depth regarding opinions, emotions, and attitudes that are not obtained from statistical analyses and are a valuable window for better understanding and responding to a population's needs. Focus groups also allow researchers to gather information that could not be obtained from surveys or questionnaires. For example, participants can be separated into distinct demographic groups for greater analysis of their respective responses to the same questions.

A list of potential focus group sites for the Puerto Rican Young Men and Family Poverty Project, was generated from various sources, including NCLR's affiliate organizations, the National Puerto Rican Coalition, and other community-based organizations.

Several criteria were used to assess potential sites, including:

- A predominantly Puerto Rican or Latino clientele;
- Experience serving and working with young Puerto Rican men;
- Experienced and trained staff that work with youth;
- Ability to assign a Project Coordinator to arrange the focus group and recruit Puerto Rican young men for the session;
- Ability to arrange the focus group session to be held within the project time line; and
- Capacity to provide facilities to hold the focus group.

Through telephone conversations, general profiles of each CBO were developed to determine which CBOs met the criteria. Based on these criteria, four sites were selected: ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey in Newark, NJ; Concilio Hispano de Cambridge in Boston, MA; El Puente in Brooklyn, NY; and Youth Guidance in Chicago, IL.

All focus group sites were in predominantly Hispanic areas with large Puerto Rican populations. Each CBO was given a draft of a guide to organizing focus groups, based on previous focus group project guides, and was required to sign contracts which outlined their responsibilities as well as NCLR's obligations. The focus groups were held between late October and early December 1993. To ensure consistency and confidentiality, Project Director Sonia Pérez moderated and Research Associate, Steven Cruz recorded each focus group session. A focus group discussion instrument was prepared for each discussion (See pages 57-61).

A total of 44 young men participated in the focus groups with 8-12 participants in each group. Of these:

- All were Puerto Rican;

- All were bilingual or spoke English as their first language, except for one participant who had recently moved to the U.S. from Puerto Rico and predominantly spoke Spanish;
- 23 were age 16-19, 13 were age 20-24;*
- Of the young men who gave their age, only one of the 23 young men aged 16-19 was not in school while all but three of the 13 aged 20-24 were still in school;
- Four were fathers;
- 15 were currently employed; and
- Four had participated in employment and training programs;

Tables 1 and 2 on page 56 illustrate these data.

In addition to focus groups with Puerto Rican young men, a total of ten community-based practitioners were interviewed to obtain their perspective and expertise on the issues facing Puerto Rican young men.

* Eight of the young men did not give their age.

Table 1

Family Composition of Focus Group Participants

City	Single Female-Headed Households	Married-Couple Families, (step-parents)	Couple Families (natural parents)	Alone	Single Male-Headed Households
Brooklyn	0	3	3	5	0
Chicago	3	0	3	3	0
Boston*	5	0	2	3	0
Newark	5	1	6		1
Total	13	4	14	11	1

*One lived with his siblings.

Table 2

Employment and Education Status of Focus Group Participants

City	Employed	Unemployed	In School	Out of School
Brooklyn	5	6	7	4
Chicago	5	4	3	6
Boston	3	8	8	3
Newark	2	11	11	2
Total	15	29	29	15

II. Question Guides

CBO Project Coordinator Questions

- What do you believe are some of the biggest challenges facing urban youth? What about young Puerto Rican men between the ages of 16 and 24?
- What problems do you think young Puerto Rican men face in schools? in the work force?
- How do you think they deal with those problems?
- What proportion of the young men in your community (or that you work with) are high school dropouts? are involved in criminal justice activities? Have participated in a training program? are fathers?
- What do you think about the education and employment options for young men in your community/city? What could be improved?
- Describe the poverty among Puerto Ricans in your community. Does it differ from poverty of other groups?
- What role do you think young men play in the poverty of Puerto Rican families?
- What needs to be done by the government to reduce Puerto Rican poverty? by your city/state? by the Puerto Rican community itself?

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction – 10 - 15 minutes

Hello. Thanks for coming. My name is Sonia, and this is Steven.

Steven and I work for an organization that does research on Latino issues and we're interested in finding out about the issues that young Puerto Ricans face. We're going around to different cities to talk to young Puerto Ricans and get your opinions on different topics. I'll tell you more specific things about our project as we go along. (Also include a few words about focus groups).

You should feel free to say whatever is on your mind and whatever you think about the topic we're discussing. Whatever you say will not affect the activities you might be involved with in this organization. We're from Washington, D.C. and do not work for [organization]. This organization helped us coordinate the project here but whatever is said in this room will not be reported back to anyone here. Your names will not be used and you will not be identified with any remarks you make.

We are tape recording the discussion because otherwise we wouldn't be able to remember everything you all said. Steven and I will be the only ones who listen to the tapes. Your comments, along with those of other young Puerto Rican men in other cities, will be used to help us write a report about Latino youth. If we quote you, we wouldn't use your real names.

There are no right or wrong answers, and I will only get mad if you don't talk, since it's my job to get your ideas. Please try to participate as much as possible, with one person speaking at a time so that when we listen to the tapes we'll be able to hear things more clearly. I might interrupt once in a while to make sure everybody gets a chance to speak and to make sure I cover all the material.

We will be here until ____a.m./p.m. I promise to finish on time.

Just a few more things before we begin. I might look at my notes occasionally to remind me of everything I want to ask. I will also be keeping track of time. Steven will be taking notes, changing the tapes, etc., but he won't be participating in the discussion. You should feel free to help yourself to refreshments and, if you have to leave the room, please try not to make noise. When you return, you can come into the discussion again.

Now, if we could go around, I'd like you all to introduce yourselves. Please tell me your name, your age, and what you are currently doing (working, going to school, etc.).

Discussion Outline

Warm-Up (10-15 minutes)

The focus of today's discussion is Puerto Rican youth in the U.S.

1. How would you describe the status of the Puerto Rican community in the U.S. today? What are the main reasons why you would say they are doing well? not well?
2. What are some of the main issues that affect Puerto Rican families in this city?

Discussion (1 hour)

A. (Poverty) If they haven't mentioned poverty, ask #1:

   1. Do you think that poverty is one of the most important problems facing the Puerto Rican community?
   2. About what percent of Puerto Rican families in this city do you thing are poor? What does it mean to you to be poor; how do you define poor?
   3. Do you think Puerto Rican poverty is different from poverty facing other groups? How? Why?
   4. What do you think makes Puerto Ricans poor? How much of the problem is that there aren't enough jobs? Or, is it that Puerto Ricans aren't doing enough to help themselves (e.g., not working hard enough)?
   5. What makes you consider a person successful?

B. (Youth) Let's talk about Puerto Rican youth.

   1. How do you think Puerto Rican youth are affected by problems/issues that affect Puerto Rican families?
   2. How do you think Puerto Rican youth are doing in this city? Do you think they are having the same experiences as Puerto Rican youth in other cities? What about compared to Puerto Rican youth on the island?
   3. What do you think are some of the major problems facing Puerto Rican youth in this city?
   4. What do you think is the hardest thing about growing up in your community? the best?

C. (Education) I'd like to talk more specifically about your experiences in school.

   1. How would you describe the public education system in your city? On a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 is perfect, what would you rate the school system here? Why?
   2. What do you think is good about public schools? Bad?

3. How would you describe the experiences of Puerto Rican teenagers in the schools in this city? Do you think it differs from the experiences of other youth (Black, White, or other Latino)?

4. Do you think Puerto Rican young men have a harder or easier time in school than Puerto Rican young women? Do you think a male-female difference in schools exists for Black, White, or other Latino youth?

5. Where do most of your friends go when they leave school?

6. In your opinion, is a college education accessible to people in your neighborhood? Do you plan to go to college?

D. (Employment) Now I'd like to talk about jobs and your experiences with work.

1. What are some of the ways that you try to find work?

2. What kinds of jobs are available for you, which you could do, if you were looking right now? Is there anything that prevents you from working at that job? What kinds of jobs do your friends want? What does it take to get those jobs?

3. What are some of the issues or problems you face when you try to find a job? How about once you have a job?

4. Is there anything about these problems that is difficult for you because you're a Puerto Rican male? Do you think Puerto Ricans have more problems holding their jobs than other people? Why?

5. For those of you who have participated in training programs, what has been your experience?

6. If you were to design a training program for young Puerto Rican men, what would the program offer?

E. Miscellaneous

1. Why do you think so many Puerto Rican young males get involved in criminal activities?

2. How does it affect their families?

3. Do many of your Puerto Rican young male friends have children? Why? How does that affect them?

4. Do you think of getting married one day? of having a family?

F. Bring back to family

Do you think what Puerto Rican young men do affects whether their families will be poor or not? Why? How?

What do you think is needed to improve the status of young Puerto Rican men and their families?

If you could improve the status of Puerto Rican young men and their families, what would you do?

(Aspirations)

What type of family do you think you want to form in the future? (How many kids, your job, your spouse, etc.).

Wrap-Up (10 minutes)

1. What do you think the future holds for you? Where do you see yourself going?

   How do you feel about that? Who are your role models and the people you look up to? Why?

2. Use your imagination and tell me what you would most like to do if you could. What would be necessary for this to happen?

3. Who do you think can help young Puerto Rican men and their families? Why? How?

4. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you think we should think about when we write about young Puerto Rican men?

Thank you for coming. I think your comments will be very helpful when we write our report. If you're interested in a copy of the report, see Steven and he'll take down your name and address. Thanks again.

III. CITY PROFILES*

Boston, Massachusetts

Slightly more than one in 23 residents (4.4%) in Boston are Hispanic. Of the 122,685 Boston Latinos, more than one-third — the largest of any Latino subgroup — are Puerto Rican (35.4%), and more than one out of eight (12.7%) are Dominican; the second largest Latino subgroup (14.5%) is categorized as "Other" Hispanic. More than one out of four Boston Latinos (26.1%) are Salvadoran (6.8%), Mexican (6%), Colombian (4.7%), Guatemalan (4.5%), or Cuban (4.1%). The remaining proportion is fairly evenly divided amongst the smaller subgroups, like Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Panamanians, Ecuadorians, and Peruvians, which together constitute approximately 11.3% of the Latino population.

A significant proportion of Boston Latinos are undereducated. More than four out of ten Boston Latinos (41.6%) do not have a high school or equivalency (GED) diploma. However, more than one-third (35.3%) have at least some college experience. For example, more than one out of six (18.0%) have at least a Bachelors degree, and more than four out of ten (43.5%) of those who have an undergraduate degree also have a graduate or professional degree.

Despite limited education, more than three-quarters of Boston Latinos (76.3%) participate in the labor force. While more than two-thirds (66.9%) of Latino males in Boston are employed, almost one in ten (9.5%) are unemployed, compared to more than one in ten Black and one in 20 White residents, (10% and 5%, respectively.)

The median income of Latino families in Boston is $19,254, which is above the statewide average for Latinos ($18,099), but significantly below the overall family statewide average ($44,367). In addition, more than half (52.2%) of Boston Latino residents, compared to almost half (48.8%) of Black residents and two-fifths (40.7%) of White residents, indicated that they earn less than $25,000 annually.

Low median incomes help to explain high poverty among Boston Latinos. Almost three out of ten Latinos in Boston (28.9%) are poor. Two-fifths (39.7%) of Latino children are poor, compared to more than one in 13 White (7.9%) and almost one-third (31.5%) of Black children.

* The 1990 Census Summary Tape File 3 was the data source for all the city profiles.

Chicago, Illinois

In the Chicago area, more than one out of five residents (19.2%) are of Hispanic origin, a total of 535,315.

While the majority of Chicago Latinos (65.0%) are Mexican, the second largest subgroup is Puerto Ricans, who comprise 22.6% of the total Latino population. Another 6.5% of the Latino population is comprised of Cubans (1.9%), Guatemalans (2.4%), Colombians (1.2%), and Ecuadorians (1.0%). The remaining 5.9% is fairly evenly divided among various smaller subgroups.

Data on educational attainment for Latinos over 25 years old indicate that almost three in five Latinos (59.2%) do not have a high school or equivalency (GED) diploma. While more than one-fifth (21.4%) of Latinos have at least some college experience, only one in fifteen (6.6%) have at least a Bachelor's degree. However, 34.5% of those Latinos who have a Bachelor's degree also have a professional or graduate degree.

Although less than half of Latinos have a high school diploma or GED, seven in ten Latino residents (70.3%), the highest proportion of any group, are in the labor force. However, more than one in nine (11.7%) Latinos in this region are unemployed. In comparison, almost one in five Black (19.4%), and almost one in eighteen White labor force participants (5.4%) are unemployed.

In Chicago, the median income for Latino families is $25,219, compared to $22,453 for Black families and $40,874 for White families. Poverty data show that almost one-quarter (24.0%) of Latinos live below the poverty line, and almost one-third (32.6%) of Latino children, under five years old, are poor.

New York, New York

New York City is rich in diversity and contains a large Latino population. There are almost two million (1,737,927) Latinos in New York City, constituting almost one-quarter of the total population (23.7%).

Almost half of the Latino population in New York City is Puerto Rican (49.5%); while almost one in five Latinos is Dominican (19.1%), the second largest Latino subgroup. Another 15.8% of the Latino population consist of Colombians, Ecuadorians, Cubans, and Mexicans. The remainder is fairly evenly divided by smaller subgroups like Salvadorans and Panamanians.

Educational attainment data for Latinos in New York City present a mixed picture. The data indicate that more than half of Latinos (51.1%) over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma or equivalency (GED) diploma. Yet, almost one-quarter of Latinos (24.9%) have at least some college, but less than one in 12 (8.2%) New York City Latinos have at least a Bachelor's degree. Furthermore, almost four in ten (38.6%) Latinos who have a Bachelor's degree also have a graduate or professional degree.

Although educational attainment levels for most New York City Latinos are low, their labor force participation rate is high. Almost three-quarters of Latinos (72.2%), compared to more than seven in ten White (71.7%) and more than two-thirds of Black residents (67.4%), participate in the labor force. Of the Latinos in the labor force, more than six in ten (63.1%) are employed and 9.2% are unemployed, but actively looking for work. By comparison, one in ten Black residents (10.0%) and less than one in 20 White residents (4.7%) are unemployed.

Similar to many other cities and the nation, high Latino labor force participation rates do not necessarily equal high median income. In New York City, the median income for Latino families is $21,255, compared to $42,726 for White families and $27,371 for Black families. In addition, the median income level for New York City Latino families falls way below the statewide average for families ($39,741) and is slightly below the statewide average for Latino families ($23,031).

These social and economic data help to explain Latino poverty status in New York City, where almost one-third of Latino families (31.2%) are poor. In comparison, more than two in nine of Black families (22.1%) and more than one in 11 White families (9.2%) are poor. For children and adolescents in New York City, poverty is especially severe; five out of 11 Latino children under five (45.9%) and under the age of 17 (45.7%) are poor.

Newark, New Jersey

There are almost 70,000 Latinos in Newark, which means that one in four Newark residents is of Hispanic origin (25.0%). The majority of Newark Latinos are Puerto Rican (55.7%), while about one-fifth (21.0%) are Cuban (6.9%), Dominican (5.0%), Ecuadorian (4.6%), Colombian (2.3%) or Salvadoran (2.2%). The remaining proportion are categorized as Other Hispanic and include smaller Latino subgroups like Peruvians and Guatemalans.

In Newark, Latinos are severely undereducated. More than six out of ten Latinos (61.4%) do not have a high school or equivalency (GED) diploma; and less than one in seven (13.8%) have at least some college, while slightly less than one out of 20 Newark Latinos (4.9%) have a Bachelor's degree. Of Newark Latinos who have a college degree, more than one-third (37.3%) also have professional or graduate degrees.

Hispanic male employment data indicate that more than three-quarters of Latino males (76.4%) participate in the labor force. Two-thirds of Newark Latino males are employed (65.8%), while more than one out of ten Latinos (10.5%), compared to more than one in ten Black and less than one in 25 White residents, 11.9% and 3.8%, respectively, are unemployed.

Although Newark Latinos have a high labor force participation rate, Latino families remain the poorest and have the lowest median income of all major racial/ethnic groups. The median income for Newark Latinos is $22,039 compared to $30,740 for White and $24,697 for Black families. In addition, the median income for Newark Latino families is significantly below the statewide average for Latinos ($30,627) and below the statewide average for families overall ($47,589).

Partly as a result of low income, poverty among Latinos in Newark is high. Three in ten Latinos (30.3%) live below the poverty line. Poverty is especially high among Hispanic children and adolescents in Newark. More than four out of nine Latino children (46.7%) under the age of five live below the poverty line while four out of nine Latino children (43.7%) under the age of 17 are poor.

IV. Descriptions of Community-Based Organizations

Boston, MA — Concilio Hispano de Cambridge

Concilio Hispano's office is in the Chelsea area of Boston. The streets are lined with two to three story buildings, many of them built of red brick. Most of the buildings are home to small businesses, with incredible ethnic and racial diversity seen in the storefront signs and people. In one building, a Hispanic lawyer shares the upper floor with a Jewish dentist, with both sitting above a Chinese restaurant. Korean, Thai, Italian, Hispanic, and numerous other cultures all blend together to give a strong ethnic character to the neighborhood. The sights, sounds, and sensations seem to surround and mingle, permeating the air with a sense of what a melting pot really is like.

The Chelsea office of Concilio Hispano occupies a building in the midst of all this. Inside, GED classes are given to teen mothers and soon-to-be teen mothers. No men are in the class despite efforts to recruit young men. Lessons on volcanoes are being given and the offices are buzzing with movement as the day-to-day activities are being taken care of. The staff, most looking somewhat tired and worn down at the end of the day, are quite young. Out of this office, Concilio Hispano provides Adult Basic Education and English-as-a-Second Language and GED classes.

The GED class is part of the Primavera program. Funded by the Department of Public Welfare, Primavera targets teen parents and dropouts. Education is combined with life skills training to give the clients basic skills to help improve their chances of being accepted into a job training program or getting a job.

Social service programs are also offered through Concilio Hispano. Substance abuse, HIV case management, mental health, and children's protective services are provided, as well as interpretive and translation services for the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. As with the education services provided by Concilio Hispano, social service programs are also provided as multicultural and multilingual services.

Concilio Hispano was founded in 1969 to provide educational and social support services for the minority residents of the Metro North Boston area. Concilio Hispano resembles the other CBOs involved with the focus group process in its ability to deliver these services, serving as a mediating presence between the local government support service agencies and Concilio Hispano's clients.

Brooklyn, NY – El Puente

El Puente in Brooklyn, New York operates out of an old church building, converted into offices. The domed ceiling, adorned with a mural on the inside, crowns the open spaces of El Puente. With the use of dividers, the organization has created the learning spaces within which they operate their high school, the Academy for Peace and Justice, which opened in 1993 with a ninth-grade class. One grade will be added each year for the next three years. El Puente serves the Williamsburg community in Brooklyn, New York. Largely Hispanic, the community seems to be in constant motion, whether it is the nearby traffic of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, the delivery trucks dropping off meat at a warehouse, or the youths hanging out on the streets.

The colors, smells, and vitality in the air of Williamsburg's neighborhoods carry over to El Puente. Constant background noise, the voice of a young girl calling someone to the phone, laughter coming from a nearby classroom of students learning about volcanoes, or numerous conversations taking place, all blend together, not as a cacophony, but as a symphony of the human spirit, dedicated to rescuing its community from possible ruin.

To make this rescue a reality, El Puente has begun many programs aimed at educating and informing the community of ways to improve their life choices. Among them:

- ESL and GED classes provided to El Puente clients;
- A health education program, the MASH Curandero Center, provides substance abuse, HIV, and STD prevention information. The MASH center also provides training in both traditional and non-traditional healing arts; and
- An AIDS education drama program which educates the community about the dangers posed by AIDS through drama.

To increase its available pool of resources, El Puente has joined with other community-based organizations to create the National Association of El Puente. Some organizations involved are El Puente of Bushwick, New York, and ROCA in Boston, Massachusetts.

To provide the youth of the community with a positive outlet for their energy, El Puente also operates various sports programs and community service internships. These internships give the youth some work experience in clerical and maintenance positions, but the emphasis is on developing work habits.

Chicago, IL – Youth Guidance

The Chicago focus group session took place at the Logan Square YMCA, located on the West Side of Chicago, in a largely Hispanic area. Facing each other across the wide six-lane city street are bodegas, neighborhood supermarkets, restaurants, and a Puerto Rican bookstore. The Logan Square YMCA is centrally located for the focus group participants and offered a "neutral" site where the young men did not feel constrained by any gang-related concerns.

Originally serving unwed mothers, Youth Guidance became a school-based community agency in the late 1960s. Its mission redefined, Youth Guidance now serves Chicago as an individual and family counseling center which operates out of neighborhood schools. Youth Guidance provides school-based counseling and other support services in 14 elementary and eight high schools within the Chicago public school system.

Most of the schools in which they operate are predominantly minority schools and approximately one in four Youth Guidance clients are Hispanic. Some of the centers which Youth Guidance operates, like the one in the Roberto Clemente High School, serve overwhelmingly Hispanic populations. In these minority neighborhoods, Youth Guidance attempts to address the day-to-day issues affecting Puerto Rican young men, and youth in general.

The work of Youth Guidance is supported by a partnership among business, education, and social service agencies. Project Prepare is one of the Youth Guidance programs created by this partnership. Project Prepare used corporate funding to create a state-of-the-art food preparation facility within one of the schools where Youth Guidance operates. The vocational training program gives training and experience in the hospitality industry to young people who might not otherwise be able to receive such training.

Youth Guidance's Creative Arts Program uses the "full spectrum of the arts, performing, visual, written and musical" to become "vehicles where there may otherwise be none" to positively influence youth. The program is tailored to fit each school's population and culture. For example, the Frederick Douglass Middle School has a rap performance team and the Roberto Clemente High School has a graffiti arts program.

In order to fully serve the students and their families, Youth Guidance operates its programs according to each school's needs and atmosphere. Youth Guidance provides a social service support system for the families of minority children in Chicago and helps to get parents more involved in the school system through its counseling efforts. The organization serves to help young Puerto Rican men and other minority individuals develop themselves through education and training, in order to positively influence their lives.

Newark, NJ — ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey

Throughout its history, the ASPIRA Association of America, Inc. has addressed the educational needs of young Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, teaching them about culture and the value of education, as well as guiding young Latino leaders.

Established in 1961 in New York City, in an effort to encourage young people, primarily Puerto Ricans, to finish high school and college, ASPIRA serves to improve the educational outcomes of Latino youth by both establishing programs and working on policy changes. At the local level, after school programs and activities support young Latinos — Aspirantes — as they complete their education; the name ASPIRA is taken from the Spanish verb "to aspire." In addition, the ASPIRA Association conducts education research, policy analysis, and advocacy at the national level. Fellowships are also offered to young Latinos through ASPIRA's Public Policy Leadership Program.

ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is located in Newark, New Jersey. Near the offices of ASPIRA are factories and manufacturing sites. Working class neighborhoods ring the area. Some signs of the loss of industry are evident in the area, but not to a significant extent. The focus group was held on the third floor of the building which houses the ASPIRA office.

This branch of ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey is both the state headquarters and Newark branch. ASPIRA of New Jersey provides its clients, mostly Puerto Rican youth, with activities such as leadership programs, career counseling, and the positive environment and stimulus that are often lacking in communities in which young Puerto Rican men live.

Among ASPIRA's various programs and services are its leaders clubs and career counseling. For example, the project coordinator of the focus group at ASPIRA provides health careers counseling for *Aspirantes*.

The Newark office serves the community through its positive presence and dedication. As a community-based organization with national resources to draw upon, the Newark office of ASPIRA plays an integral role in providing services, improving opportunities, and advocating for Hispanic youth in the Newark area.

NCLR Poverty Project

Selected Publications

- ***Poverty Project Newsletter*** FREE

  Quarterly newsletter covering current research findings, policy news, Census data, and legislation on Hispanic poverty and related issues. Established Spring 1989.

- Rodríguez, Eric and Deirdre Martínez, ***Hispanics and JOBS: An Assessment of Ten States and Puerto Rico.*** August 1994 (working title, 50 pages). $5.00

  A review of the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program (JOBS) in Puerto Rico and the ten states with the largest Hispanic populations, and its effectiveness for Hispanic welfare recipients.

- ***Welfare Reform Issue Brief.*** March 1994 (25 pages). $2.00

  A summary of key welfare reform proposals and their implications for Latinos. Includes Hispanic poverty and welfare data.

- Martínez, Deirdre, ***Hispanics in the Labor Force: A Chartbook.*** December 1993 (46 pages). $3.00

  An illustrated overview of Hispanic labor force status, including data on concentration in specific industries and gender comparisons.

- Pérez, Sonia M., ***Moving from the Margins: Puerto Rican Young Men and Family Poverty.*** August 1993 (40 pages). $5.00

  Research report which examines Puerto Rican family poverty and the education and employment status of Puerto Rican young men age 16-24.

- Pérez, Sonia M. and Deirdre Martínez, ***State of Hispanic America 1993: Toward a Latino Anti-Poverty Agenda.*** July 1993 (43 pages). $7.50

  Policy analysis report which assesses the Latino groups most affected by poverty and explores strategies to reduce Hispanic poverty. Includes numerous charts and graphs.

- Pérez, Sonia M. and Denise De La Rosa Salazar, ***"Economic, Labor Force, and Social Implications of Latino Education and Population Trends,"*** May 1993 (41 pages).

  Article published in *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 2, May 1993. Includes numerous charts and graphs. Available from Sage Publications, Inc., (805) 499-0721.

- Pérez, Sonia M. and Steven Cruz, ***Puerto Rican and African American Young Men: A Comparative Analysis.*** May 1993 (46 pages).

  Paper prepared for the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts. Includes several charts and graphs.

- Pérez, Sonia M. and Luis A. Duany, ***Reducing Hispanic Teenage Pregnancy and Family Poverty: A Replication Guide.*** July 1992 (122 pages). $15.00

  A replication guide for community-based organizations interested in developing and implementing a teenage pregnancy prevention and/or parenting program targeted to Hispanic youth.

- Quiroz, Julia T. and Regina Tosca, ***For My Children: Mexican American Women, Work, and Welfare.*** April 1992 (40 pages), and ***On My Own: Mexican American Women, Self-Sufficiency and the Family Support Act.*** December 1990 (50 pages).

  Findings of a two-year project which examined the impact of the Family Support Act on Mexican American families. $5.00

For a complete listing of available research and Census data, please contact the NCLR Poverty Project.

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